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“Our Weapon is the Wooden Spoon:” Motherhood, Racism, and War: The Diverse Roles of
Women in Nazi Germany

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Masters of Arts in History

by

Cortney D. Nelson

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Dr. Stephen G. Fritz, Chair

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ABSTRACT

“Our Weapon is the Wooden Spoon:” Motherhood, Racism, and War: The Diverse Roles of

Women in Nazi Germany

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Cortney D. Nelson

The historiography of women in Nazi Germany attests to the various roles of women in the Third Reich. Although politically invisible, women were deeply involved in the Nazi regime, whether they supported the Party or not. During Nazi racial schemes, men formed and executed Nazi racial programs, but women participated in Nazi racism as students, nurses, and violent perpetrators. Early studies of German women during World War II focused on the lack of Nazi mobilization of women into the wartime labor force, but many women already held positions in the labor force before the war. Nazi mistreatment of lower-class working women and the violence against their own people, as well as Allied terror bombing and mass rape, proved the Nazis inept at protecting German women. The historiography of women in Nazi Germany is complex and controversial but proves the importance of women in the male dominated regime.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Men ruled the Nazi Party. Men controlled the legislation and programs of the regime. They held the power over all of Germany, including Germany's women. Adolf Hitler and the Nazi leaders described the ideal German woman as the mother and caretaker of the next generation of German youth. The Nazis created countless programs and legislation concerning women and the future of Germany. These programs, purposely passed, relegated women to the role of mother and caretaker of the next generation of the Third Reich while simultaneously governing the personal lives of German women. The Nazis needed women to remain in their "private sphere" in the home and the kitchen. Programs excluded women from politics and higher education. Nazi men defined the role of women in the Third Reich, although they contradicted the role of motherhood as the Nazi era progressed. Despite the Nazi belief in women as mothers who remained in the "private sphere", Hitler and the Nazis needed women to fulfill larger roles in the regime, and women did fulfill these roles.

While the Nazis spouted the gloriousness of motherhood for women, they did not exclude women from the racism of the regime. While the Nazis claimed to protect women from the "unfortunate" side of racial politics, women were very involved in the racism of the Third Reich. From the time Adolf Hitler and the Nazis came to power they preached the attributes of the German race and the need for extermination of German enemies. This attitude, ingrained in young women's education, taught them the importance of purity of the German blood. Education taught the young women sent into the east to assist in the resettlement of ethnic Germans how to recognize German enemies in these annexed countries. Women were also the social workers who

made decisions concerning sterilization. Women were the nurses who experimented on the mentally ill, and women were the guards at the Nazi concentration and death camps. Men were the leaders in the Nazi racial campaigns, but women played a key role. Racism permeated the roles of women in Nazi Germany.

Another contradiction for German women was their participation in the labor force. While the Nazis ideally wanted women to leave the labor force, many German women remained in the labor force and, except for the Soviet Union, more than any other European country before and during World War II. The claim of Germany's failure to mobilize women ignored the women who worked the entire Nazi era. Women in the labor force was a powerful role for the women of Germany, more so than the role of mothers of the Reich. German women of the countryside were invaluable to the war effort but received little assistance from the Nazis. The Nazis attempted labor schemes to ease female laborer burdens, which sent young women to assist on farms and in factories, although most of these schemes failed.

Hitler especially needed women as morale keepers during the war. Hitler continued to fear a repeat of World War I and Germany's "stab in the back." For this reason, he needed to keep the women on the home front happy. This was the reason why the Nazis did not mobilize women effectively. Morale was very important, but so was race. Women caught in compromising positions felt the power and cruelty of the Nazi regime. The Nazis attacked Germany's own population and its valuable Aryan population. These attacks caused another drop in morale on the home front.

The men of Nazi Germany are the focus of countless historical studies after World War II. Men as leaders, participants, advisors, soldiers, and bystanders filled pages of historical studies, but women during the Nazi era received little attention. The role of the female in Nazi

Germany seemed a simple one: motherhood. Because the Nazis preached the value of the mother, historians overlooked other female circumstances. Historians studied the women of the Third Reich as policies and programs, most of which focused on motherhood. The idea was not *who* women were, but *what* women were in Nazi Germany. Standing behind men, historians placed women in superficial roles. Women as wives or vindictive neighbors were nameless, faceless, and voiceless. The role of women in the Third Reich was deceptive though because women did more than breed the children of the Reich. The Holocaust was a horrendous part of the Nazi era, and historians studied the women as victims of persecution and violence during the Nazi period. Other studies indicated many women found purpose within the Nazi Party. Women actively supported the party, and many concentration camps hired female guards. Women were mothers, supporters, bystanders, neighbors, laborers, victims, and perpetrators of the Nazi regime.

Clifford Kirkpatrick wrote one of the earliest studies of women in Nazi Germany. Kirkpatrick resided a year in Germany in the mid-1930s and filled pages with information about women and the Nazis. Published in 1938, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life*, Kirkpatrick's volume examined women during the peak of the National Socialist era.¹ During his year abroad, Kirkpatrick observed the changes women faced under Nazi politics. He examined the issues concerning women, like work, children, and the home, and, he even interviewed German women on the subject. He followed the rise of Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the Nazi *Reichsfrauenführerin*. Kirkpatrick interviewed many women, some scared to speak against the political party, and some who excitedly shared their positive experiences. His study proved women were an integral part of Nazi society.

¹ Clifford Kirkpatrick. *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1938).

Aside from Kirkpatrick's study, historians confined women to paragraphs or chapters in larger studies of the Nazis. Historian Joseph W. Bendersky briefly mentioned the ideology the Nazis set in place concerning the role of women, "Motherhood and child rearing were promoted as being among the highest values of society, while individual fulfillment of women outside the home was condemned as a selfish concept."² The Nazis did not want women outside of the home. The Nazis needed men to be the leaders and to control Germany. The Nazis needed women as mothers. Many studies on Nazi Germany excluded gender issues beyond the Nazi ideal mother. Studies ignored the women who remained outside of the home, whether in the labor force or any other place in Nazi society. As the historical field progressed women found a more prominent place in Nazi studies.

Men ruled the Nazi Party. Men created the laws and ruled the people, women included. Historians studied women based on the policies and rules of society. Hitler's ideal women were nothing more than wives and child bearers. Historian Leila Rupp observed, "The Nazi leaders urged women, within their separate sphere of the home, to bear numerous children in response to the call for a vigorously growing 'Aryan' population. Just as men served the state by fighting, women served by bearing children."³ After World War I and the Nazi ascension to power, new committees and programs assisted women in motherhood. A section of the Law to Reduce Unemployment, called The Marriage Loan, encouraged women to leave the work force and enjoy motherhood. This incentive provided couples intending to marry a tax-free loan to assist with household operations as long as the women chose not to enter into the labor force. Within weeks of the program's onset, a decree stated the production of children canceled twenty-five

² Joseph W. Bendersky. *A History of Nazi Germany* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1985) 164.

³ Leila J. Rupp. "Mother of the 'Volk': The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology," *Signs* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1977): 363.

percent of the loan.⁴ Although Nazis disagreed with women in the workplace, programs assisted them as well. Female workers benefited from maternity leaves and other programs. Programs and requirements for the Hitler Youth introduced female students into the Nazi doctrine of motherhood.

Historians focused on the separate spheres for men and women and the formation of women's organizations. Many European men and women believed in separate spaces and duties for men and women, so the Nazis were not unique in this attitude. Historian Claudia Koonz studied Nazi women and their support of Nazism. She stated, "From another standpoint, Nazism promised a kind of perverted equality by destroying everyone's rights."⁵ The creation of women's associations led women to support the Nazis. Women's associations, like the NS-Frauenschaft, urged women to stay within their family and household duties. Mothers taught and shaped children, influenced husbands, and made decisions on what and where to buy.⁶ Women's associations also focused on charity work. Women raised money for the Winter Relief Program and other welfare programs.

Historians studied women behind the scenes: the nameless wives of SS commanders. Historians portrayed these women blinded to the violence in Germany. Christopher Browning noted in his study of Reserve Police Battalion 101, the wife of an SS officer stood in the marketplace while her husband murdered the Jewish citizens of the town in front of her.⁷ Even in concentration and death camps women ignored the suffering surrounding them. "But this ought not blind us to the fact that individual women—as officials and as wives and as guards—not

⁴ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (New York: Barnes and Nobel Book, 1975), 47.

⁵ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 74.

⁶ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present Volume II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 305.

⁷ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 93.

understood that genocide existed as a policy, but themselves sustained it.”⁸ Some women even profited from the plight of prisoners and victims in the ghettos and camps.

Historians portrayed women as petty and spiteful, especially when it came to denunciations. An anonymous letter, written to the Gestapo, accused a woman of ‘looking Jewish’ and having a sexual relationship with a neighbor.⁹ Women denounced rivals to the Gestapo for being pregnant or just unpopular. Female denouncers, many non-Nazis, used the police to seek revenge against anyone who slighted them. In *Women in Nazi Germany*, historian Jill Stephenson stated, “While for the states purposes denunciation served political ends, by uncovering nonconformists and dissidents, for the denunciator it was often means of settling a personal score.”¹⁰ Revenge through denunciation during the war years held serious consequences. The accused could face hard punishment for imagined crimes. Although Stephenson and Vandana Joshi exposed the women as denunciators, Joshi’s research proved men, more than women, denounced others for “crimes” against the *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹¹

In opposition to that stance, historians viewed all women as victims of Hitler and the Nazis. Jewish women suffered of course, but as historian Gisela Bock hypothesized, even Aryan German women were victims during the Nazi era. While she understood the role of Jewish women, gypsies, and minorities as victims, German Aryan women also suffered from the Nazi intrusion on motherhood. Nazism affected German women by imposing “sexism in the form of unwaged housework on ‘superior’ women.”¹² She defined “racist sexism” as female victims who

⁸ Koonz, *Mothers*, 403.

⁹ Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), viii.

¹⁰ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 115.

¹¹ Vandana Joshi, *Gender and Power in the Third Reich: Female Denouncers and the Gestapo 1933-45*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 175.

¹² Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in *When Biology Became Destiny*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984): 288.

were encouraged for procreation because of their purity and “sexist racism” as those the Nazis considered impure. She stated, “More strictly speaking, we might call the imposition on the first group as ‘racist sexism,’ since their procreation is urged not just because they are women, but because they are women of a specific ethnicity or social position declared as ‘superior.’” She continued, “Accordingly, we might call the imposition on the second group of women ‘sexist racism,’ since their procreation is prohibited not just on the grounds of their ‘genes’ and ‘race,’ but on the grounds of their real or supposed deviation, as women, from social or ethnic standards for ‘superior’ women.”¹³ The debate on Bock’s assessment remains high.

Education of women in Nazi Germany deserved historical study because education was important for the young girls of Germany. This meant education in Nazism and motherhood. In Weimar society women sought a higher education, but the rise of Hitler and the Nazis changed the educational system. The four-year *Volkschule* taught the same curriculum for young male and female students, but senior schools differed for male and female students. Historian Michael Karter described propaganda for the girls’ school emphasized communal fun, friendship, pleasure, athletics, and competition.¹⁴ Academics played a small role in the education of young women. Instead of mathematics and sciences, the NS-Frauenschaft introduced classes for young women in sewing and home economics. “Nazi priorities eroded traditional girl’s education, through racist and sexist propaganda in class, through attempts to suppress confessional schools, and through the disruption of school life by the demands of BDM activities.”¹⁵

Racism played a massive role in Nazi society. Hitler and the Nazis passed laws denying Aryan women contraception and abortion but permitted them for non-Aryan women.

¹³ Ibid, 420.

¹⁴ Michael Karter, *Hitler Youth* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004), 80.

¹⁵ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 75.

Women found contraception though because the practice went underground. Abortion was punishable by law if women were found guilty, but again, women found ways around these laws.

Sterilization of women developed as a significant historical subject. Women considered feeble-minded faced the courts concerned with the purity of the Aryan race. Courts sent ill or recovered schizophrenics, “promiscuous” women, the non-institutionalized, and inmates or ex-inmates of institutions to sterilization centers.¹⁶ Some men faced forced sterilization, but women made up about 80 percent of the fatalities. These fatalities, not just from failed abortions and sterilizations, “but also because of what sterilisation meant to them: the destruction of their bodies and their female identities.”¹⁷ Once in camps, women faced doctors who forced sterilization procedures and other experiments on prisoners.

Racial policies and laws also forced non-Aryan women into appalling situations. The Nuremberg Laws defined the roles of Jews, Gypsies, and other minority groups, giving Germany an “us and them” mentality. The laws did not define the rights of citizens but legalized prejudice and violence against conceived corrupt, unsavory people and the “useless eaters.” Many women who considered themselves Germans fell into these categories. Anti-Semitism figured prominently in Hitler’s Germany. Historian Doris L. Bergen described a relationship between Hitler’s sexism and anti-Semitism. Hitler used female imagery and vocabulary to belittle Jewish men and other “enemies.” He accused Jewish men of defiling Aryan women, promoting homosexuality, and other moral deprivations.¹⁸ Violence followed Jews into concentration and death camps. Women faced sexualized violence in the form of forced nudity upon arrival at the

¹⁶ Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism,” 281.

¹⁷ Matthew Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich* (London: Arnold, 2003), 60.

¹⁸ Doris L. Bergen *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 39.

camps.¹⁹ Other camp procedures sexually victimized women, including sending women into camp brothels.

The history of the Holocaust has been the topic of many studies. Mothers, young women, and children faced the harsh treatments of these turbulent times in Germany's history, but gender did not factor into many Holocaust studies. Sybil Milton stated, "The general subject of women and the Holocaust has received no systematic coverage in the growing literature on Nazi Germany and the Jewish catastrophe."²⁰ After much research historians turned to the plight of women during the Holocaust. Rochelle G. Saidel studied the Ravensbrück camp for women, and defined the camp as "a special hell for women."²¹ Women became death camp victims also. Trains brought thousands Jews daily to the Auschwitz death camp. Guards separated the men from the women on the train platform. Guards then divided the women into the young and able-bodied and sent the elderly women, pregnant, and mothers with small children straight to the incinerators.

The field of historical memory fascinated historians of the Third Reich. Alison Owings interviewed women who lived in Germany during the Nazi era. These women recounted their lives and understanding of the event surrounding them. Women of all classes and situations willingly told their stories; former members of the Nazi Party, war widows, Hausfrauen, a former concentration camp guard, and a woman who actually spoke with Hitler.²² Historical memory

¹⁹ Brigitte Halbmayr, "Sexualized Violence Against Women During Nazi 'Racial' Persecution," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, ed. Sonja Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2010), 30.

²⁰ Sybil Milton, "Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women," in *When Biology Became Destiny*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 297.

²¹ Rochelle G. Saidel, *Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 12.

²² Alison Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), xv.

also related to the lives of Jewish women who survived the Holocaust. Lea Ausch Alteras interviewed three generations of Jewish women to portray how the Holocaust affected survivors, daughters, and granddaughters.²³ Historical memory brought renewed interest in the women of the Third Reich.

The issue of historical memory brought the question though: why did women follow Hitler and the Nazi regime? Hitler's charisma, 1930s depression and starvation, and even the embarrassment of the Treaty of Versailles brought male and female votes to the NSDAP.²⁴ Some women agreed with the separate sphere ideals Hitler preached. Anti-Semitism and racial hygiene also played a role in female backing. Although clearly anti-feminist, the Nazis still had strong support from the women of Germany. Propaganda films showed women cheering at rallies and party events. For young women in the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM), the compulsory year of work brought excitement into their lives. These young women went into the east to Germanize annexed territories and resettle ethnic Germans. In the excitement of these vacation assignments, women largely ignored the treatment of the local non-German population.²⁵ Not all women shared the same reasoning or opinions for their support of the Nazis; therefore, the question for support from women does not have a unanimous explanation.

Within the study of women in Nazi Germany were the women in the labor force, many of whom held positions within the labor force before the Nazi rise to power. Hitler did not want women workers, though, but with the invasion of Poland and subsequent war, the Nazis needed to mobilize women for war work. "Hitler's strictly domestic view of the German women's role

²³ Lea Ausch Alteras, *Three Generations of Jewish Women: Holocaust Survivors, Their Daughters, and Granddaughters* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002).

²⁴ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 15.

²⁵ Elizabeth Harvey, "'We Forgot All Jews and Poles': German Women and the 'Ethnic Struggle' in Nazi-occupied Poland," *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 3 (2001): 447.

in society naturally proved untenable; a wartime economy demanded ever more workers for the factories as able-bodied men were called up for military service at the front.”²⁶ Unfortunately, the Nazis had a difficult time of mobilizing women for war work, even though influential female leaders spoke of the need for working women. Industries avoided hiring women because of the mass of foreign workers. Workers from Poland and the Soviet Union worked longer hours for less pay. For this reason factory owners preferred the foreign workers to German women. The owners did not have to abide by the rules and regulations for German women. German legislation for the work environment did not affect female foreign workers either, for example if a female worker became pregnant employers sent her home or demanded she abort the baby.²⁷ Statistics for women in the labor force changed little during the Nazi era and World War II.

Historians studied the women in general during the Nazi period, but some paid particular attention to the women of Hitler’s social circle. In his study, *Hitler’s Women*, author Guido Knopp created an anthology of the women who knew Hitler as a man and not just a political figure.²⁸ These women were part of Hitler’s inner circle, although their influence on him remained unknown. Anja Klabunde authored a micro-history of the unofficial First Lady of the Third Reich, Magda Goebbels. She married the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, and enjoyed the comforts of the Nazi life. Her love for both Goebbels and Hitler raised her status among the followers of Nazism and brought her the social status she sought.²⁹ She followed the rules and ideals of the Nazi regime because she enjoyed the comforts and station they brought her. She willingly murdered her children for Nazi cause before committing suicide in 1945.

²⁶ Gordon Williamson, *World War II German Women’s Auxiliary Services* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 4.

²⁷ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 95.

²⁸ Guido Knopp, *Hitler’s Women* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

²⁹ Anja Klabunde, *Magda Goebbels*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Sphere, 1999), 145.

Other women also abided by Hitler and Nazi life. German historian Heike B. Görtemaker examined Eva Braun's role in Hitler's life. Many historians of Hitler and the Nazis exclude the fourteen-year relationship between the dictator and his girlfriend. Görtemaker asked, what effect did Braun have on Hitler? Although she never held any political position and mostly stayed behind the scenes of the Nazi regime, she did marry "evil incarnate."³⁰ Women held no political office in the Nazi Party, but they still wanted to be members. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink convinced herself of her Nazi importance, although Hitler and other Nazi leaders considered her a joke. She worked hard for the Nazi Party. She led countless women to the Nazis and created programs for the women of Germany although she never actually held any official political position in the Party. Some of the women of Germany, those she hoped to influence, considered her too fanatical for their support though.

Violence holds a prominent position in the studies of Nazi Germany, and recent studies disagree with Bock's assessment of Aryan women as victims during the Third Reich. German citizens acknowledged the existence of concentration camps, and these average citizens witnessed the ghettos and death camps. The violence and terror did not only come from German women acknowledging ghettos and camps, some German women joining the violence. Women became some of the most violent perpetrators. Historian Flint Whitlock studied the "Beasts of Buchenwald," Ilse and Karl Koch. Ilse Koch and her husband terrorized the prisoners of the Buchenwald camp and enjoyed it immensely, allegedly creating human-skin lampshades.³¹ The latest study of women and Nazi violence, written by historian Wendy Lower, followed the women headed to occupied countries in the East. She focused specifically on the active

³⁰ Heike B. Görtemaker, *Eva Braun: Life with Hitler*, trans. Damion Searls (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 4.

³¹ Flint Whitlock, *The Beasts of Buchenwald: Karl and Ilse Koch, Human-Skin Lampshades, and the War Crimes Trial of the Century* (Brule: Cable Publishing, 2011).

participants in the Holocaust. Lower did not publish *Hitler's Furies* to display female victims of the Third Reich but to display Hitler's female executioners. Lower specified, "A third of the female population, thirteen million women, were actively engaged in the Nazi Party organization, and the female membership in the Nazi Party increased steadily until the end of the war."³² Women actively participated and enjoyed the violence and terror associated with the Nazis and the Holocaust.

Historians also studied women during World War II as labor force workers and morale keepers on the home front. As the Second World War continued and men left their homes for the front lines, the Nazis needed women to fill the jobs that men once held. The Nazis needed women to leave the home and join in the workforce for the *Volk*. The Nazis did not want to conscript women for war work though because they believed forcing women into industries would hurt the morale on the home front, as well as on the battlefields. But historian Leila Rupp noted, "It is clear that employed women resented non-employed women of whatever class, and that non-employed women of the working and lower middle class refused to go to work while upper middle and upper class women flaunted their wealth and leisure."³³ The Nazi lack of conscription caused a loss of morale on the home front for this reason. Lower class women resented the Nazis and their allowances for upper and middle class women.

The role of foreign workers and women was also important to the study of women in Nazi Germany, especially during the war. Historians Jill Stephenson and Elizabeth Heinemann each studied women and foreign workers. Stephenson stated, "The issue involving foreign workers that caused most friction between German civilians and the Nazi authorities was that of

³² Wendy Lower, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 11.

³³ Leila Rupp, "Women, Class, and Mobilization in Nazi Germany," *Science and Society* 43 (1979): 58.

sexual relationships, particularly because of Nazi racist obsession with maintaining the ‘purity’ of German blood.”³⁴ Heinemann stated women often worked closely with foreign workers, and many times when husbands left for war women felt as though they were single again, especially very young women and newly married women.³⁵ The close contact with foreigners was exciting and relationships developed among German women and foreign workers.

The role of gender in Nazi Germany appeared within the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Historians found that women were more involved in Nazism than previously believed. The history of women in Nazi Germany is complex. Just after World War II historians excluded women from many studies of Nazi Germany. The focus of historical inquiries about women did not occur until almost twenty years after Hitler’s suicide and the fall of the Nazi regime. Even as the field changed to include women, studies pushed women into the background as nameless and faceless citizens. Historians then studied women as a unified group. All women assumed the same ideas and obeyed the same orders. Yes, Nazi women’s organizations supposedly represented all German women, but women varied in life styles, educations, social classes, and personalities. The place of gender in Holocaust studies intrigued historians. Ravensbrück and the female section of Auschwitz meant the Nazis considered gender differences among victims.

The indication of female participation in Nazism turned historians to another aspect of women in Germany. These women stayed behind the scenes but worked hard for the Third Reich. Recently historical focus turned from supporters and denouncers to perpetrators. These

³⁴ Jill Stephenson, “Triangle: Foreign Workers, German Civilians, and the Nazi Regime. War and Society in Württemberg, 1939-45,” *German Studies Review* 15 (1992): 358.

³⁵ Elizabeth Heinemann, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?: Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 46.

women enthusiastically joined men in the violence and terror in the East. Overlooked in many Nazi studies after World War II, women played a significant role in Nazi Germany.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN AND THE PERFECT NAZI MOTHER: DEFINING THE NAZI IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD

Time Magazine honored Adolf Hitler as “Man of the Year” in 1939. His rise to power signified a new Germany, one free from the horrors and embarrassment of the First World War. President Paul von Hindenburg appointed the popular Hitler as Chancellor in 1933, and, following the death of Hindenburg in 1934, Hitler appointed himself dictator over all of Germany. The former weak Weimar government disappeared and the new Third Reich emerged. Hitler brought pride back to the German people and created programs to pull Germany out of depression. Before long, men clamored to sign onto the party and boys dreamed of days with Hitler youth. Most women did not seem affected by the new dictator; after all, Nazis believed women belonged behind the scenes. Of course, many women did not stay behind the scenes and publicly announced their support of Hitler and the Nazis; many even joined the Party. Some women enjoyed the status of belonging to the Party and married high-ranking officials. Even non-Nazi party members enjoyed the programs the new government had created. Of course, not all women found Hitler and the Nazis wonderful. The Nazis often ignored and discouraged women in the work force, and their ideas on racism, sterilization, and euthanasia created dissention among women and men. Many overlooked women’s history in Nazi Germany, but women were integral to the society.

Historians have had difficulty explaining women in Nazi Germany. Why would women follow a clearly anti-feminist government? “Some Nazi men routinely insulted women in the crudest terms. The pages of Julius Streicher’s magazine for SA Men, *Der Stürmer*, featured illustrated stories of Jewish men raping blond women and derided women as stupid, lustful, and

deceitful.”³⁶ Did women follow Hitler because, as historian Joachim Fest suggested, women were sexually attracted to him? Were women just complacent and did they just follow the rules and guidelines set forth to them by male leaders? Did they turn fellow Germans into the Gestapo for revenge? What types of women followed Hitler and the Nazis?

The history of women in Nazi Germany is complex. Historians excluded women from many studies of Nazi Germany after World War II, mostly because women held no political power in the Nazi regime and therefore did not “participate” in the racist society. When historians wrote about women, they pushed women into the background, deprived them of names, and labeled them insignificant wives. In a male driven society, like Nazi Germany, women found their places behind men. Women in Nazi Germany varied in life style, education, social class, and personality, but historians often focused on female population as a whole. The focus remained on the ideal Nazi woman and the programs offered to women. The historical field in the study of women changed with the rise of feminism and women’s lib in the 1960s and 1970s,³⁷ almost twenty years after the suicide of Hitler. Women became more than wives, they became victims of a racist, sexist society. Recently the historiography of women in Nazi Germany entered into a new phase; one where women actively participated in the Nazi atrocities. First, it is important to study the place of women in Nazi society.

Women held no political place within the Nazi government, but women did still support the Party. As avid Nazi supporter Gertrud Scholtz-Klink declared, the German people were limited and selfish. Women did not learn their roles in Germany through a limited education, but Hitler changed this for them. He reminded women of their duty to Germany. As she stated, “He

³⁶ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 59.

³⁷ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (New York: Barnes and Nobel, 1975), 1.

grabbed us by our ears and said something like: ‘My dear people, you really have to learn to go to this way, thinking not only of your own little self, of your wants and your specialty, but rather you have to see once more what your people’s needs demand of you.’”³⁸ The German people demanded of women motherhood.

Hitler focused on motherhood as the role for women. Speeches given by Nazi leaders to women especially exalted the role of the mother. Germany needed mothers to raise and care for the next generation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Nazi programs offered women incentives to become mothers and awards for women who already had children. The Nazis created the *Lebensborn* for unmarried mothers, and the National Socialist Welfare Organization (NSV) assisted in maternity and children’s welfare programs. Although the Nazis praised the role of the mother, racism found a hold. Aryan women raised and taught the next generation of healthy men. Sociologist Clifford Kirkpatrick described the role of (Aryan) women in Nazi Germany as three “planks.”

The first plank was reproduction. German women were to fulfill their true nature by reproduction devoted to strengthening the intimate tribal group. The second plank was womanly work. National Socialism was bent on subduing woman’s work function to an ideal of womanliness, regardless of economic forces and the individual differences among women. The third plank was the home. Family life was to be strengthened so that German women could enjoy security and happiness in the domestic sphere.³⁹

The birth rate and population meant everything to the Nazis. They created programs and incentives for women and married couples to produce children. The first incentive came with the Marriage Loan scheme in June 1933. This scheme allowed married couples a loan of up to 1,000 Reichmarks to assist with the setting up of a home. The couples received certificates, which

³⁸ Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, speech delivered to a Party Rally, 1936, in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. and trans. Randall Bytwerk (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008)

³⁹ Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1938), 125.

aided in the purchase of household goods. This worked twofold for the Nazis, couples created families, and jobs for men came with the production of household goods.⁴⁰ Within three weeks of the introduction of the marriage loans, the Nazis announced that with the birth of each child, the loan repayment decreased by 25 percent.⁴¹ Although this proved to be a popular incentive for women, the stipulation that the wife must leave the labor force stopped many couples from applying for the loan. By 1937, though, the loan requirements changed and gave loans to those families where the wife remained in the workplace. This change made the ideal Nazi mother confusing. Did the Nazis need women to remain in the home and let men work, or did the Nazis needed women to work within the home as well as in the labor force? The Nazis wanted the mother to remain in the home sphere, but when they needed workers, preached the value of women in the labor force.

Although women had no political power, leaders of women's groups, especially Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, played a key role in the creation of programs to assist mothers. Scholtz-Klink's most ambitious program was the Reich Mother's Service. This program offered welfare assistance for women struggling after World War I. Her program taught women domestic skills and child rearing. By 1936, the Reich Mother's Service founded over one hundred fifty schools and provided courses in household administration, including cooking and sewing, general care, nursing and (racial) hygiene, and education, including child training and homemaking.⁴² Some classes even taught women how to choose the right (racially pure) husband. The Service stated all German women, meaning racially pure women, over the age of eighteen could join, regardless of her religious or political views. Scholtz-Klink estimated by October 1, 1937, over

⁴⁰ Ibid, 131.

⁴¹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 46.

⁴² Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 74.

1.1 million married and unmarried women had been instructed in over 56,000 courses.⁴³ The Service offered Nazi ideals to German women by providing support needed for current and future mothers.

The Nazis wanted to create a “cult of motherhood” where racially desired births increased and the German mother became the idyllic Nazi woman. Programs and propaganda allowed the Nazis to display the “cult of motherhood.” Paintings, sculptures, and posters portrayed the German mother breast-feeding and surrounded by healthy children.⁴⁴ Nazi Women’s Association urged women to set goals in shaping their children. Cooking German meals, singing German song, supplying the home with German furnishings, wearing German clothes, and decorating with German art meant a mother “could instill in her children and love for German culture, customs, and morality.”⁴⁵

Nazi programs assisted in the creation of the “cult of motherhood.” One example was the implementation of Mother’s Day. In 1934, Mother’s Day became an official holiday in Germany. This holiday meant to place the German mother as the center of the celebration. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels ordered factories to give men the day off, churches to preach the theme of motherhood, theatres to only show appropriate plays and distribute free tickets to families, mothers whose children have left home, and “lonely old widows.”⁴⁶ In 1938, the Nazis introduced the Honor Cross of the German Mother. Mothers received the award based on

⁴³ Ibid, 91.

⁴⁴ Rural women especially appeared in Nazi propaganda. The Nazis wanted all German women to view rural women as the ideal for women. Rural women were not influenced by popular culture and European trends like urban women were. Rural women worked from dawn until dusk for the Reich. Even though the Nazis praised rural women, these women were often the poorest in Germany.

⁴⁵ Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk’: The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology,” *Signs* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1977): 364.

⁴⁶ Stibbe *Women in the Third Reich* London: Arnold, 2003), 41.

number of children. There were three levels of the award: bronze, silver, and gold. Mothers received the bronze cross for having four to five children, the silver for six to seven, and the gold for eight or more children.⁴⁷ For families of twelve or more, mothers acquired the Gold Cross with Diamonds.⁴⁸ The Hitler Youth saluted them, and mothers with the Honor Cross could step to the front of grocery lines. Mothers with ten children obtained even greater privilege, if the tenth child born was male; parents could name him Adolf.⁴⁹ Of course, restrictions always existed within Nazi programs. Jewish and Gypsy mothers were ineligible. Also excluded were women who had children with several partners and families described as racially impure or dysfunctional. “A drunken husband would also prove a liability for those hoping to gain the medal, as would a history of family debt and a female inclination towards smoking.”⁵⁰

Hitler and the Nazis also preached the idea of separate spheres for men and women. “Just as men served the state by fighting, so women served by bearing children.”⁵¹ This concept was not a new one or an original one to Germany. Many European countries as well as the United States preached for separate roles for men and women. Men joined the work force and entered into politics while women cared for the home. This led historian Jill Stephenson to believe the Nazi regime was more “backward thinking” than oppressive. “...the Nazis did not accept that they were subordinating women completely to men; rather, they claimed, they were drawing a distinction—a natural distinction—between areas of activity of men and women, so that each sex might better preform its function for the good of the nation.”⁵² Men cared for the larger world

⁴⁷ Martin Kitchen, *A History of Modern Germany: 1800 to Present* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 36.

⁴⁸ Martyn Whittock, *The Third Reich: The Rise and Fall of the Nazis* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2011), 158.

⁴⁹ Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 517.

⁵⁰ Whittock, *The Third Reich*, 159.

⁵¹ Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk’” 365.

⁵² Stephenson, *Nazi Society*, 8.

while women cared for the smaller world. The Nazis claimed not to regard female roles as inferior to male roles; instead, the roles were equal only separate. In his speech to the National Socialist Women's League Hitler asked, "But what would become of the greater world if there was no one to tend and care for the smaller one? How could the greater world survive if there was no one to make the cares of the smaller world the content of their lives?"⁵³ Scholtz-Klink mirrored Hitler's view with her idea of the woman's weapon was the wooden spoon.

The Nazis also dictated fashion in the Third Reich. Hitler demanded the BDM uniforms be stylish; he did not want the mothers of Germany wearing clothes and using cosmetics that were popular in other European countries. The women of Germany were to dress in neutral colors and with refinement, not in the outlandish fashions of European trends. A German cleric stated that the Parisian prostitute and the Jewish manufacture dictated what the German woman should wear.⁵⁴ This accusation appalled many Nazi leaders. The European fad of women smoking cigarettes also appalled the Nazis because German women were supposed to keep their bodies pure. Women smokers hurt Germany because smoking affected all aspects of women's lives, especially hurting her chances of reproduction. This reason allowed the Nazis to ration less cigarettes to women as they did to men. "When tobacco rationing was implemented early in the war, women only received half rations."⁵⁵

Racism and sexism permeated Nazi Germany; therefore, the programs geared toward women and motherhood cannot be discussed without considering the role each of these play. The Nazi vision for women (and society for that matter) focused on the need for a pure Aryan race.

⁵³ Adolf Hitler, Speech to the National Socialist Women's League, September 8, 1934, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-ddc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1557 (accessed October 11, 2014).

⁵⁴ Hans Peter Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany* (New York: Dorset Press, 1973), 80-81.

⁵⁵ G. Davy Smith, S. A. Ströbele, and M. Egger, "Cigarette Smoking and Health Promotion in Nazi Germany," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 51 (1997): 206.

This showed the Nazi link between sexism and racism. The Nazis wanted women to bear and teach the next generation, but only women deemed worthy by their standards. The state intervened on behalf of the female population. This ensured that “valuable” Aryan German women reproduced and impure women did not. Legislation and police investigation assisted the Nazis in determining who the most “valuable” were. “Miscegenation—racial mixing through marriage and/or sexual intercourse—was therefore anathema to Nazis. Anyone with parents belonging to different races was regarded as a mongrel fully belonging to neither.”⁵⁶ Legislation defined the *Mischlinge* as Aryan, but one who had either one or two Jewish grandparents. *Mischlinge* were discouraged from procreation.

This racist belief led to marriage laws for those wishing to wed. In 1935, the Law for the Protection of the Hereditary Health of the German People passed. This law set the standards for which couples must meet before they could wed. The couple was required to pass an examination to receive the Certificate of Suitability of Marriage from a physician. Physicians prohibited couples from marrying if either partner showed signs of illness that might harm his/her spouse or future children. These signs could be physical, mental, or found in the Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring (July 1933).⁵⁷ If one partner was determined to be unfit, physicians recommended sterilization.

The marriage law excluded Jewish and “asocial” women, these women did not belong to the Aryan race, and therefore, they did not have the same restrictions. Instead of tests and certificates, these women faced sterilization. Although she was the *Reichsfrauenführerin*, Scholtz-Klink had to follow the marriage laws. When she became engaged to her third husband,

⁵⁶ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 26.

⁵⁷ Stephenson, *Nazi Society*, 41.

SS General Heissmeyer, Nazi officials searched her family heritage back for generations to find Jewish ancestors.⁵⁸ Even the perfect Nazi woman was not exempt from racial investigations.

The marriage laws also made it easier for couples to divorce. The law introduced “irretrievable breakdown” as reason for divorce, where previously one partner must be guilty of adultery, cruelty, or desertion.⁵⁹ Paragraph 55 of the law allowed couples to file for divorce if they were separated for at least three years, their partner refused to procreate, or sought an illegal abortion. In these cases courts provided divorces for men who disclosed plans to marry another woman and father more children. The issue of support of the divorced spouse was also included in the law. The guilty husband must support his former wife in the life she is accustomed if she did not have income from property or could not find employment. This was also true for the guilty wife if the former husband could not support himself.⁶⁰ Eventually, legislators added a provision, that implied that the guilty man might no longer need to support his former wife if she could find a job in the labor market.

Divorce also became a racial program as well under the marriage laws. Nazis feared “mixed” marriages, and the marriage law meant to prevent these, although large numbers of families in Germany fell into the “mixed” category. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws prohibited marriages and extramarital relations between Aryans and Jews, but even before the laws, Aryan and Jewish couples faced harassment. Officers forced Aryan women, accused of having a relationship with a Jew, to parade in the street with signs around their necks proclaiming: “I have committed racial treason” or “I fornicate with Jews”.⁶¹ After the passage of the Nuremberg

⁵⁸ Ibid, 182.

⁵⁹ Stephenson, *Nazi Germany*, 29.

⁶⁰ Stephenson, *Nazi Society*, 43.

⁶¹ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 68.

Laws, Jewish men or women who had affairs with Aryans faced harsher consequences. It became the new crime of *Rassenschande* and meant severe punishment. Nazi officers sent Jewish men accused of racial defilement to camps and the Aryan women faced public humiliation and torment. Jewish women were “taken into custody by the Gestapo and forced to go through humiliating interrogations merely to satisfy the voyeuristic pleasures of the Gestapo officials present.”⁶²

An interesting turn of events led to the divorce among high-ranking officials in the Nazi regime. Wives of officials were often reprimanded for their outspoken views on Nazi policies. Men like Martin Bormann despised the wives of Nazi members because he believed these women should not speak of politics. Many Nazi leaders discouraged wives from lavish personal lives; they should limit the number of servants in the home and refrain from extravagant products and events. Wives who did not follow these rules faced divorce from their Nazi husbands. Accused of failing to be the ideal Nazi wife and keep up with husband’s growing responsibilities, husbands requested divorce because the wife caused the failure of “an exemplary National Socialist marriage.”⁶³ As Hans Peter Bleuel stated, many husbands accused wives of the failure of the marriage, but the true reason for divorce was that the wives no longer satisfied them.⁶⁴

Because of the needs for these laws, Party officials in the Racial Policy offices even started a campaign for Aryan Germans. These were the Ten Commandments for Choosing a Spouse:

1. Remember you are a German!
2. Remain pure in mind and spirit!
3. Keep your body pure!

⁶² Ibid, 68.

⁶³ Bleuel, *Sex and Society*, 141.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 141.

4. If hereditarily fit, do not remain single!
5. Marry only for love!
6. Being a German, choose only a spouse of similar or related blood!
7. When choosing your spouse, inquire into his or her forbearers!
8. Health is essential to outward beauty as well!
9. Seek a companion in marriage, not a playmate!
10. Hope for as many children as possible!⁶⁵

Because motherhood was the ultimate goal for women, the Nazis banned the advertisement and sale of contraceptives. With the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, the Nazis created an official population policy concerning the birth rate. With this policy, the party dissolved most birth control operations and the Law for the Protection of the People and the State allowed local Nazi leaders to close birth control clinics.⁶⁶ Hitler told women, “The use of contraceptives means a violation of nature, a degradation of womanhood, motherhood, and love.”⁶⁷ The Nazis also accused outside factors like British and French “modern” women and even communism. The Nazis feared communism and blamed Marxist propaganda for women wanting birth control and abortion rights.⁶⁸ Scholtz-Klink proclaimed the Bolsheviks, by allowing women control over their own bodies, lowered the birth rate and created tired, overworked women.⁶⁹ None of the policies or propaganda eliminated the availability of birth control though, and the use of it went underground.

New marriage counseling centers, or “eugenic counseling” centers, opened to the public and the punishment for abortion, except on medical grounds, became more severe. Doctors arrested for providing abortions for Aryan women faced harsh punishments. During wartime

⁶⁵ Koonz, *Mothers*, 189.

⁶⁶ Stephenson, *Nazi Society*, 61.

⁶⁷ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present Volume II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 210.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 210.

⁶⁹ Hamilton T. Burden, *The Nuremberg Party Rallies: 1923-39* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 127.

arrested physicians faced death. Because of these anti-abortion programs, the 1930s saw a decrease in the number of abortions performed from 35,000 in the early 1930s to less than 2,000 by the decade's end.⁷⁰ Female physicians (as well as Jewish) felt the brunt of the law. Even though only five percent of doctors were female, the majority of arrests were women physicians. The reason for the number of female physician arrests resulted because a large number of women were gynecologists who could possibly perform abortions. Nazi legislation did not allow female physicians insurance, so many of these women worked in their husbands' offices but still faced consequences and arrests.⁷¹ For these reasons female physicians felt the need to continue their practice secretly.

The Nazis took control of female bodies with their laws and legislation, but Germany was not the only European country afraid of the falling birthrate. French government created pro-natalist propaganda in the 1930s and outlawed information about birth control and abortion. Italy and Russia held mother's day programs and awarded medals to mothers with children. "Fascist Italy also saw an attack on women's work and an attempt to reduce women to the status of child bearers and child rearers, and in Soviet Russia the relatively liberal sexual atmosphere of the 1920s gave way under Stalin to a much more prudish and repressive regime."⁷² England also felt the effects of a falling birthrate after World War I and created its own versions of "motherly" programs.

Non-Aryan women did not face the same obstacles concerning birth control and abortion, in fact, the Nazis recommended these women receive contraceptives and abortions. If Jews, gypsies, and "feeble-minded" women avoided pregnancy, then the non-Aryan people

⁷⁰ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 515.

⁷¹ Koonz, *Mothers*, 186.

⁷² Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 523.

disappeared. Forced sterilizations of men and women began in 1933 with the passage of the Law for Prevention of Hereditary Diseased Offspring.⁷³ The Hereditary Courts determined who were the “lives unworthy of life” and needed sterilization. The law listed nine categories for determining sterilization: five related to psychiatric “invalidity” (schizophrenia and depression for example), physical “invalidity” (paralyzed and deformation for example), and severe alcoholism.⁷⁴ People with deformations were subject to sterilization courts. This was ironic because the Nazi Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels, had a deformed foot and had to wear tailored shoes.

The *Lebensborn* program also created tension in Nazi Germany, especially because it created confusion about the ideal Nazi woman. In fact, Magda Goebbels, the unofficial First Lady of the Third Reich, despised the program. Nazi women were the caretakers of the family. This meant a home and husband, but the *Lebensborn* wanted to take care of the unwed mother. The unmarried mother was a stigma in Germany during the Nazi era, but a “pure” woman needed to be cared for, married or not. The Nazis needed Aryan women for motherhood, and some unmarried mothers were the perfect Aryan women. Under the direction of Heinrich Himmler, the Nazis founded the *Lebensborn*. This organization cared for unmarried pregnant women who faced ridicule and scorn for illegitimate children but were also racially superior women. The *Lebensborn* created maternity houses and set up adoptions for the illegitimate children to proper SS families. Adoptions were not always easy though because of the stigma attached to children of unwed mothers, and many racial experts believed illegitimate children

⁷³ Margaret L. Arnot and Corelie Usborn, *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 1999), 253.

⁷⁴ Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in *When Biology Became Destiny*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984): 279.

often fell into the “hereditarily unfit” category.⁷⁵ Into the war and the annexed countries, the *Lebensborn* kidnapped children with Aryan appearances and cared for “war children” in German occupied zones.⁷⁶ These “war children” came from relationships between local acceptable women and occupying soldiers.

The *Lebensborn* felt a backlash for its praise of the unwed mother, though. Many viewed the maternity houses as breeding houses and stud farms. Jokes ridiculed the *Lebensborn* as a breeding program for women and the SS. The *Bund Deutscher Mädel* became *Bund Deutscher Milchkühe* (League of German milk-cows), or *Bedarfsartikel Deutscher Männer* (useful things for German men).⁷⁷ Many women, even Nazi supporters like Magda Goebbels, had difficulties supporting the unwed mother. The idea of Nazism and motherhood meant the women taught the next generation, but the *Lebensborn* allowed mothers to leave their children behind while they returned home. Himmler wanted the *Lebensborn* to be places women of “pure blood” could turn instead of having an abortion. He described the maternity homes as places where, “any German mother of good blood can await in serenity the hour when she commits her life to her nation.”⁷⁸ Even throughout the war, Himmler fought for the *Lebensborn*.

Womanly work focused mainly on the home, but many women in Nazi Germany did not have the luxury of being a housewife. Many women worked in factories and other positions in the labor force. Hitler and the Nazi leaders spoke out against these women, and during the 1930s tried to discourage “double-earners”. National Socialism wanted to rid the labor force of women

⁷⁵ Flint Whitlock, *The Beasts of Buchenwald: Karl and Ilse Koch, Human-Skin Lampshades, and the War Crimes Trial of the Century* (Brule: Cable Publishing, 2011), 155.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 156.

⁷⁷ Koonz, *Mothers*, 399.

⁷⁸ Stephenson, *Nazi Germany*, 150.

and allow women to fulfil the calling of motherhood.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, for Hitler, relieving the workplace of women was almost impossible. Factories were reluctant to fire cheap female laborers, and many women eighteen to twenty-five needed work to support themselves before marriage.⁸⁰ Women earned considerably less than male counterparts in most industries and often faced hardships men did not. Often factories and industries denied women benefits, tolerated harassment, and offered no opportunity for advancement.

Nazi leaders realized they needed women to fill other job positions. They did not want women to work in heavy industry but needed women in other work areas. While men performed physical labor and politics, women were needed for “motherly” work, like nursing, social work, and teaching. Nazis removed married women from the work force to have more children, but unmarried women found jobs as nurses, social workers, secretaries, and teachers.⁸¹ These jobs sent married women from factories into more comfortable jobs and allowed for healthier bodies. By the mid-1930s, with German economic expansion, the Nazis began to accept women in the work place, and in 1934 created a woman’s division of the German Labor Front, led by Gertrud Scholtz-Klink. This new division oversaw the welfare of seven million women. Scholtz-Klink’s division had four main tasks for the welfare of women in the labor force: social welfare for employed women, protection of health and childbearing needs, labor legislation, and the implementation of courses to teach female workers how to care for the home.⁸² In a letter submitted to Joachim von Ribbentrop, Scholtz-Klink stated, “It is therefore the business of the *Frauenamt* to ensure that women are not employed in any capacity that might provide

⁷⁹ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 84

⁸⁰ Ibid, 86.

⁸¹ Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany: A History* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1988), 178.

⁸² Stephenson, *Nazi Society*, 96.

detrimental to their womanhood and to give them all the protection to which they are specifically entitled.”⁸³ The *NS-Frauenschaft* appointed social workers to heavy industries to observe and contain dissent among female workers.

By 1937, as Hitler prepared for war, the party changed tactics for women in the labor force. The Nazis revised the marriage loan requirements and stated couples were eligible if wives *remained* in the work force. Although the Nazis did not want married women in the work force, by the end of the 1930s, their attitudes changed. Industries tried to create half-day shifts and provide day care centers for women with small children. Economic growth also allowed women to enter into the industries they were once ordered to leave. The rise of women in industry was significant, from 1.21 million women in 1933 to 1.85 million women in 1938.⁸⁴ Women still faced lower wages and inflexible working hours though, and often given more monotonous tasks to finish. A number of women entered into the white-collar industry also as secretaries in offices.

As in the industrial field, agriculture also needed women to fulfill roles at work. Wages for agricultural work lagged far behind industrial work, sending many farmers and families into cities to find work.⁸⁵ While the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (DAF) attempted to assist women in industry, representatives often ignored the wives and daughters on farms. These women were seen more as housewives and consumers, rather than employees, “even though they often worked for 16 hours a day and were involved in managing the tasks of milking cows, feeding poultry and collecting eggs, looking after kitchen gardens, baking bread, making cheese and so on, as well as in marketing their produce and purchasing animal feed and other vital resources.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, “The Place of Women in the New Germany,” in *Germany Speaks*, ed. Joachim von Ribbentrop (Berlin: AMS Press, 1938), 90.

⁸⁴ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 88.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 89.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 90.

While Nazis preached the value of the farmer and his family, daughters did not want to marry farmers, and many mothers did not want them to as well. These young women wanted to marry teachers or factory workers. They did not want to remain on a farm for the rest of their lives. For these reasons, Nazi policies created the Land Year and the *Pflichtjahr* for young girls finishing school who planned to enter the job market.

The government reserved the right to make all unmarried women under the age of twenty-five spend six months to one year in domestic or agricultural service.⁸⁷ By 1936, the Labor Service set up camps which “intended to instill in the inmates a sense of service and selflessness, with a uniform dress of simple style, the abjuring of all manner of luxury and daintiness—sturdy boots saw to that—and a particular ban on cosmetics.”⁸⁸ These camps and the compulsory *Pflichtjahr* sent young women to rural areas to work. Unfortunately, the *Arbeitsmaiden* often disrupted farms, did little to help, or found ways of avoiding the work all together.

The youth of Germany meant everything to the Nazis. “Consequently, it is true to say that never before or since in German history did youth occupy such positions of power—relative to their age, never did every action seem of almost national importance, as in Hitler’s Germany.”⁸⁹ The youth of Germany required molding and shaping to become the leaders of the *Volkgemeinschaft*. These required implementation into youth schooling. Women’s education flourished during the Weimar era; women studied mathematics, chemistry, biology, history, and literature. In the *Volkschule* (elementary school) children learned German history, geography,

⁸⁷ Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany*, 179.

⁸⁸ Jill Stephenson, “Women’s Labor Service in Nazi Germany,” *Central European History* 15 no. 3 (Sep 1982): 252.

⁸⁹ H.W. Koch, *The Hitler Youth: Origins and Development 1922-1945* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1975), 131

language, and culture. This education was “the ideal medium for instilling ideas of German superiority, the NSDAP’s ‘mission’, the ‘injustice’ of the Versailles territorial settlement, and the plight of Germans living under foreign rule.”⁹⁰ Secondary school continued this education but also included classes in shorthand and typing as well as homemaking instruction for female students. These classes prepared women for their “womanly work”.

The Nazis took charge of schooling for children and in April 1933 passed the Reich Law for the Re-establishment of Professional Civil Service. This law allowed investigators into schools to flush out “unsuitable” and “unreliable” teachers, meaning teachers who did not follow the Nazi doctrine of education. Many headmasters and headmistresses lost their positions. Those who survived needed to educate in the “spirit of National Socialism,” although some teachers resisted this form of education.⁹¹ This law affected all educators and, within the first few months of Nazi takeover, terminated all female administrators and many female teachers. Gradually, by 1934, the Nazis realized the need for female educators, but even then, female teachers faced the hardship of educating young women and instilling a sense of pride while also claiming women were inferior to men.⁹²

The number of women enrolled in universities rose during the Weimar period, and women entered into professional careers. The Nazi takeover changed all of this. Universities set restrictions based on sex; no more than ten percent of acceptances were to women.⁹³ Although female students were restricted from universities, the Nazis still needed women as teachers, nurses, and other professions that required higher education. Universities often accepted over the

⁹⁰ Stephenson, *Nazi Germany*, 71.

⁹¹ Whittock, *The Third Reich*, 147.

⁹² Koonz, *Mothers*, 201.

⁹³ Stephenson, *Nazi Society*, 133.

ten percent quota of female students. During the war years, when the Nazis decreed all women should work, women entered into colleges to avoid working. Although this went against the German mother ideal, highly educated were needed in the labor force.

The Nazis changed the educational system but also expanded youth organizations, like the Hitler Youth, the Labor Service, and the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM). The Hitler Youth (HJ), the boys organization, was created in 1926 and the League of German Girls (BDM) four years later. In 1933, membership to these organizations was voluntary, but by 1935, Nazis increased pressure on young people to join the HJ or BDM. The HJ expanded as well as the BDM and, by 1939 almost as many girls participated in the youth organizations as boys.⁹⁴ The requirements stated that girls must join the *Jungmädel* by age ten and then the BDM from fourteen to eighteen. The educational value differed among the boys and girls organization, though. During his time in Nazi Germany, Gregor Ziemer observed the difference between the boys and girls curriculum, “Hitler and his school urge BDM girls to have babies. But they do not permit the girls to be educated in the same schools with boys.”⁹⁵ While the boys curriculum offered military studies and Hitler worship, the girls curriculum focused on home economics, culinary classes, and sewing. Girls could even earn master’s degrees in household science.⁹⁶ The most important aspect for the BDM though was the comradeship between girls. Girls from different social classes and regions joined in common activities.

The Nazis tried to instill pride in the BDM girls, and even foreign visitors noticed this attitude. As sociologist Kirkpatrick noted, “In 1936 some two million uniformed girls were

⁹⁴ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 113.

⁹⁵ Gregor Ziemer, *Education for Death: The Making of the Nazi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 129.

⁹⁶ Rebecca Rogers, “Learning to be Good Girls and Women: Education, Training and Schools,” in *Routledge History of Women in Europe Since 1700* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 121.

marching through Germany wearing navy blue skirts, trim white blouses, brown jackets and twin pigtails. Foreign visitors to Germany cannot fail to be impressed with the fresh healthy faces of these girls, the enthusiasm of their songs and the optimism and vitality which they radiate.”⁹⁷ Kirkpatrick, an American and in no way a Nazi sympathizer, begrudgingly admired the discipline of the BDM.

The BDM allowed girls and young women a chance to participate in competitive sports, physical activity, politics, and racial awareness lessons.⁹⁸ Although the program taught National Socialist ideology, many girls just joined the BDM to rebel from parents and schoolteachers. Often BDM activities fell during school hours allowing girls to leave school to attend these events. BDM girls disrespected parents who disagreed with the program, and teachers and principals suffered the lack of discipline as well. BDM leaders belittled the authority of adults and even reported teachers who did not follow Nazi policies to the Gestapo.⁹⁹ BDM activities meant to teach decorum but also brought about disrespect and rebellion.

Melita Maschmann joined the BDM in her teenage years without her parent’s knowledge or consent.¹⁰⁰ Maschmann was from the higher social class when she joined the BDM in secret. She joined to rebel against her parents, especially her mother, and the “bourgeois snobbery” of her social class.¹⁰¹ Maschmann’s parents opposed the appointment of Hitler and protested his laws and decrees. In her memoir, Maschmann wrote about her actions with the BDM, such as

⁹⁷ Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 90.

⁹⁸ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 114.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 115.

¹⁰⁰ Melita Maschmann was a teenager when the Nazis took control over Germany. She joined the BDM and worked her way through the rank to a BDM leader, all of the time ignoring the racism behind all of the Nazi ideals. She published her work, *Account Rendered: A Dossier of my Former Self*, in the 1960s. She formatted the account in a letterform to her unnamed Jewish friend, who escaped Germany during the Nazi period.

¹⁰¹ Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered: A Dossier on my Former Self*, trans. Geoffrey Strachan (London: Aberland-Schuman, 1964), 10.

marching through Jewish quarters shouting Jews needed to “wake up from their naps.”¹⁰² Her best friend was Jewish, but this did not contain her enthusiasm for the Nazis. *Volksgemeinschaft* fascinated her and she believed the Nazis would create a society where men and women of all classes lived together like brothers and sisters.¹⁰³ She, and other young women, fell for the Nazi Party because of their need for rebellion against parents or, the chance to belong to something bigger than their social class. Young women wanted to escape from a childish, narrow life to one of greatness.¹⁰⁴

Maschmann expected excitement from the activities of the BDM but was disappointed at first. She found many meetings boring. In her account of her time as a member of the BDM she wrote, “The evening meetings for which we met in a dark and grimy cellar were fatally lacking in interest.”¹⁰⁵ She also did not fit in with her group. While many of the girls worked as servants, dressmakers, shop girls, and office workers, Maschmann attended secondary school. She eventually found another group and made her way through the ranks of the BDM, all the while believing, National Socialism “could only be brought into being by declaring war on the class prejudices of the social stratum from which I came and that it must, above all, give protection and justice to the weak.”¹⁰⁶

The Land Service year also created opportunities for young women. Multiple organizations created land service programs, but each program followed the same guidelines. Young men and women ages seventeen to twenty-five worked on farms or other projects, like road or canal building, for a six month to one-year term. In exchange, these young workers

¹⁰² Koonz, *Mothers*, 194.

¹⁰³ Maschmann, *Account Rendered*, 10.

¹⁰⁴ Koonz, *Mothers*, 189.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 10.

received lodging, food, and even a small amount of pocket money. This labor service meant to educate young people, provide manual labor on farms and other rural projects, as well as teach Nazi ideology. The land service participants believed they belonged to an elite group that would provide a positive example for the uneducated rural people.¹⁰⁷ Reich Labor Service Leader Konstantin Hierl emphasized the development of the proper attitude of work, and wanted to instill the sense of community among Germans of all classes.¹⁰⁸ Male volunteer participation in the Land Service scheme outweighed female volunteers until 1934 when female participation became compulsory.¹⁰⁹ This program assisted two-fold for the Nazis. It indoctrinated young women into Nazi ideology and brought relief to Nazi mothers.

Many young women did not enjoy this “forced labor.” Maschmann enjoyed the BDM, but she complained about the family she was assigned.¹¹⁰ She described them as filthy and ill mannered, everything her middle-class upbringing taught her not to do. Some young women believed the Land Service and *Pflichtjahr* was abysmal and tried to avoid the term altogether. Young women who did spend a year away often felt homesick. A young woman, Irmgard Lotze, left the *Pflichtjahr*, then the Land Year, because the farmers expected to have sex with her.¹¹¹ Many young women enjoyed their service though. For these young women, the Land Year was a wonderful opportunity for adventure.

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Harvey, *Women in the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanisation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 48.

¹⁰⁸ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 116.

¹⁰⁹ Male participation became compulsory in 1933 and on July 26, 1935, the National Labor Service Law went into effect. It stated all young people, male and female, must join the Labor Service. Jews were excluded from the law. Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 94.

¹¹⁰ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 119.

¹¹¹ She was then classified as “asocial” and institutionalized. Stephenson, *Nazi Germany*, 81.

The invasion of Poland offered even more opportunities for young women in the BDM, Land Service, and *NS-Frauenschaft*. These women were sent into Poland and other annexed countries to resettle ethnic Germans. Himmler's program implemented Germanization to conquered territories and sent educated women to assist newly settled ethnic families. These women helped establish schools and kindergartens; they aided mothers with the setting up of households, organized schools, took surveys, and even taught kindergartens until qualified teachers arrived. The women took over educational and welfare programs and introduced "Germaneness" to the people of Eastern Europe.¹¹² These female settlement advisors helped anywhere in the area, but ignored two important groups in Poland: the Poles and the Jews. The Nazis sent the displaced Poles and Jews to ghettos, and then ethnic Germans arrived to claim their former homes.

The women sent into the east were from the *Altreich* and aged mainly from mid-twenties to early thirties. They originally trained in one of the Nazi youth programs, like the BDM, or graduated from Nazi universities. Propaganda described the evils of the Polish government and the unfair treatment of ethnic Germans by the Polish government, and reminded these women to have no sympathies for the Polish people. Convincing propaganda claimed the Poles had shown no mercy for the tens of thousands of ethnic Germans, so the students need not show mercy to the Poles.¹¹³ Student Irene K. from the University of Heidelberg treated her time in the east as a vacation-type experience. In her journal, she detailed the shops and window displays as if she

¹¹² Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*, 1

¹¹³ Elizabeth Harvey, "We Forgot All Jews and Poles": German Women and the 'Ethnic Struggle' in Nazi-occupied Poland," *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 3 (2001): 447.

were on a school field trip. She observed a “crooked-nosed” Jewess crossing a busy street to avoid the sidewalk one afternoon.¹¹⁴

Maschmann, who also served her Land Year in Poland, viewed it as a grand adventure, one in which she fulfilled her duty to Germany. She wrote, “Our existence at that time was for us like a great adventure. We were all the happier because we had not sought out this adventure ourselves in order to satisfy our own desire for excitement. We felt that we had been summoned to take part in a difficult and noble service, by which we believed ourselves to be fulfilling our duty towards the ‘Reich’.”¹¹⁵ Maschmann and other BDM members believed honor and sacrificed their selves for their love of Germany.

Scholtz-Klink kept her fingers in this program as well and created a Christmas program for the students. She presented money to the students to fulfill “legitimate Christmas wishes” for the settlers.¹¹⁶ By 1940, Scholtz-Klink and the *NS-Frauenschaft* sent over thirty full-time advisors into the East to assist with the organization and “Germanization” of the new colonies.

The role of women in Nazi Germany was complex. Not all women supported Hitler, but many did. Historian Claudia Koonz described female supporters as lower class rural women, but this description did not fit all Nazi women. The role of Nazi women was complex, mostly because Germany needed women to breed the next generation, but the Nazis often were unclear about the role of women outside of this idea. Marriage laws stipulated women must leave the work force, but as Germany entered into the war this law was revised so women needed to remain in the workplace. Nazis wanted women to have the “weapon of the wooden spoon” and

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 447.

¹¹⁵ Maschmann, *Account Rendered*, 73.

¹¹⁶ Harvey, *Women in the Nazi East*, 149.

remain in the home, but then sent women into the East. Nazis changed education for women and set quotas for women in universities but needed educated women to work in white-collar professions. Some women were superficial and enjoyed the life brought to them by SS husbands and other leaders, but women did more for a regime that cared little for them.

Women in Nazi Germany and Nazi women did not receive much study until the feminist movement of the 1970s. The study of these women began slowly because women had no authority in Nazi Germany. Men ruled the party and gave the orders. This did not mean women remained unaffected. Women needed to bear the next generation of Nazi children. They ought to stand with their husbands but remain in their separate spheres. Women did not need to be intellectual but needed to be motherly. They needed to marry and leave the workplace. The role of women was more complicated though because the Nazi ideal woman and mother could not exist. When Hitler prepared for war, he needed women to return to the work place. He rid schools of female teachers and administrators but returned them because he needed educated young women to go into the east. The Nazis did not want women in political roles but relied on Scholtz-Klink to be the model for German women. Some women, just like some men, feared the Nazis or even rebelled against them, but many followed Nazi leadership. Women held a large role in a clearly anti-feminist society.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN AND NAZI RACISM: FEMALE ATTITUDES AND INVOLMENT IN NAZI RACIAL CAMPAIGNS

Adolf Hitler was obsessed with creating the perfect Aryan race, and for this reason he needed women to fulfill these roles. He required women to support the Party, obey husbands, and most importantly birth and nurture the next generation of the master race. With the passage of legislation and laws, the Nazis attempted to create perfect Nazi women. These Nazi feminine ideals were contradictions for women because of the ultimate Nazi obsession with racial identity. By commanding girls to join the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (The League of German Girls), the Nazi approved lessons prepared girls for future motherhood and educated them in racial superiority. This education was important for young women, especially when many of them went into the east after the deportations of Jews and other citizens. Some BDM girls became part of the nobility of German society and married into the Nazi Party. These women benefited from the Nazi racial destruction. The Nazis created the BDM programs to be the only education a Nazi girl needed, but racial programs required women of higher education, beyond sewing and motherhood preparation. These women were secretaries, social workers, nurses, and doctors, and each played an important role in racial programs. The Nazis preached women in the “private sphere” but needed educated women for racial programs. Women left their “separate sphere” and joined men in sterilization programs and concentration and death camps. Female denouncers allowed the “average German citizen” a role in racial conflicts as well. The Nazis and the Gestapo required average Germans to keep them informed of dealings within the population. Supposedly, the Nazis believed, women supported the Party and because of this loyalty reported illegal activity. Many female denouncers did not care for the Party; they only denounced others

for selfish reasons. The roles of women in Nazi race relations were not always evident, but women were involved in the Nazi racial issues.

Women and racism in the Third Reich evolved as studies increased in the role of women in Nazi Germany. In her study, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” historian Gisela Bock explained all of the women in Germany suffered from Nazi racial policies. She defined the term “racist sexism” as the need for women of superior origins to procreate, while other women, those considered inferior because of race or abnormality, faced “sexist racism.”¹¹⁷ Her study determined some women did physically suffer from Nazi policies, but the Aryan women also suffered, therefore making all women victims.

Bock’s study was very important in the historiography of women and racism in Nazi Germany. Women were victims, but women also willingly supported the race relations of Hitler and the Nazis. Historian Elizabeth Harvey studied German women sent to the East. Her study, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization*, presented the women of Germany sent to assist with the resettlement of ethnic Germans in Poland. These women were deeply involved in the racism of the Nazis and many of the women worked enthusiastically for the Party. Their “womanly work” in the East “functioned to reinforce the National Socialist hierarchy of nationality and race in which the Jews were destined to have no place and the Poles no rights.”¹¹⁸ Harvey found that some women reluctantly joined these programs, but they still did their duties for the Nazi cause.

¹¹⁷ Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in *When Biology Became Destiny*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984): 420.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Harvey, *Women in the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanisation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.

Recently historians studied women in concentration and death camps. These women voluntarily joined in Nazi racism. Historian Wendy Lower studied these women, some of whom enjoyed the violence of the camps. She explained that these women actively supported racism and were as cruel as many of the men of the Nazi Party. As Lower stated in her study, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*, men ran the agencies of Nazi persecution, but women were the staff. While men were charged with commanding the killing squad, women were not far behind. Women as professionals and Nazi wives benefited from the destruction of the Jews and Poles, and women in military positions had authority over subordinates.¹¹⁹ Women were also very violent in the killing fields. Women were as dangerous as men in the racial programs, just not as publically obvious as men.. For this reason, historians recognized that women were extremely active in Nazi racial policies.

The *Bund Deutscher Mädel* wanted to create the ideal German girl, so she would grow into the perfect Nazi woman and mother. The BDM wanted to mold girls into Nazi women. Hitler believed young girls needed to be re-educated in National Socialist ideals. The BDM girls became members of a community and willingly approached their future destiny as mothers of the new generation.¹²⁰ The BDM taught young girls to prepare for the role of German mother but also allowed young women to become avid members of the Nazi Party and all of their racial hatred. While young women looked forward to joining the BDM for friendship and fun, the BDM disguised military training as competitions and games.¹²¹ This provided young women the training for racial violence. A Jewish secretary remembered a young female guard at the

¹¹⁹ Wendy Lower, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 5.

¹²⁰ Baldur von Schirach, "The aims of the BDM," in *Women in Nazi Germany* Jill Stephenson (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 163-64.

¹²¹ Ibid, 420.

¹²¹ Michael Karter, *Hitler Youth* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004), 80.

Birkenau camp. “The chief of this block was an eighteen-year-old girl in high black boots, who ran around her living cemetery, laughing every time a truck arrived. What made a young girl so abnormal?”¹²²

Before joining the BDM, teachers taught young women racial attitudes. Before Hitler’s rise, schoolteachers taught children lessons on everyday subjects without political connotations. As Hitler gained political power, teachers became the educators for the youth of Nazi Germany. Teachers who did not support the Nazis, lost their jobs and were replaced with Nazi supporters. Irmgard A. Hunt remembered her grade school teacher as a fanatical Nazi. In her childhood memoir she wrote, “From the day Mutti delivered me into Fräulein Stöhr’s clutches it was obvious that this woman was a fanatical Nazi, a true believer. Surely she had become a teacher not because she had an affinity for children but because she wanted to tyrannize them.”¹²³ Teachers brought Nazi views into the classroom. Many lessons not only taught the children the values of National Socialists but also the importance of racial superiority. Education was the way to indoctrinate the ideas of the Nazis. School curriculum included math equations that calculated the economic justification for murder of “useless eaters” to Nazi-approved textbooks that taught how to distinguish a Jew from a German.¹²⁴ As Bernhard Rust stated, “As early as 1933, it was announced that all education had to be founded on the principles of biological and racial science, with which—in compliance with the Führer’s wish—all schoolchildren were to be made

¹²² Irene Schwarz, “Memoir of Irene Schwarz of Gestapo office work at Birkenau,” in *Sources of the Holocaust*, ed. Steve Hochstadt (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2004), 232.

¹²³ Irmgard A. Hunt, *On Hitler’s Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 118.

¹²⁴ Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 39.

familiar.”¹²⁵ This was important for girls especially because they were the ones sent into the East to help with resettlement opportunities.

After BDM and Nazi schooling, young women especially found their roles in the East. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, millions of Poles and Jews fell under Nazi control. This allowed German women to travel east from the *Altreich* into acquired German territories. These women, sometimes reluctantly, assisted in the resettlement of ethnic Germans in occupied Poland. Many Nazi and Nazi women’s organizations sent the women east to assist in the setup of households, teach children, and assist in the welfare of the resettled families. The Nazis wanted to expand the *Volksgemeinschaft* into newly acquired land, and this meant ridding the resettled countries of the native peoples because “the noble, refined, and intellectual qualities were everywhere in danger of being suppressed by the brutality of the primitive.”¹²⁶ Many of the German women sent to the East shared the same sentiment, especially concerning the Jewish population.

In her study of German women in the East, historian Elizabeth Harvey studied Irene K., a German student sent to the East, and described how she “forgot all Jews and Poles.” Irene K. viewed her new life in Poland as an adventure. She and her friends enjoyed the sights of the area and did not even consider the actions taken against the Poles. She ignored the expulsion of Poles and Jews from their homes. Melita Maschmann also viewed her time in Poland as an adventure and ignored the Poles who lost their homes. Maschmann wanted away from her parents and wanted an adventure. She found it with the Nazis

¹²⁵ Bernhard Rust, “Education in the Third Reich,” in *Germany Speaks*, ed. Joachim von Ribbontrop (Berlin: AMS Press, 1938), 102.

¹²⁶ Melita Maschmann, “A German Colonizer of Poland in 1939 or 1940,” in *The Nazi State and German Society*, ed. Robert G. Moeller (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 115.

Maschmann remembered her adventure in Poland. Her first encounter in Poland displayed the racism the Nazis taught her. She told the story of her first “service” in the East. On the train, she assisted a mother with a large family. Maschmann took the smallest child and cared for her so the mother could have some relief. She kept the child throughout the entire journey and by the end the child needed to be changed and had given Maschmann lice. Maschmann made a discovery about the family though, “Next morning I discovered I had been looking after the youngest offspring of a family of Polish seasonal workers. Though I felt I had learnt my lesson for my over eagerness, I could not help seeing the funny side.”¹²⁷ In her eagerness to be the ideal BDM girl, she mistakenly believed the family to be German. She provided care for a Polish family; a family that she believed did not deserve the care.

Although Irene K. and Maschmann forgot about the Poles and Jews, many women did not. Although men planned and executed the programs and attempted to contain disorder, many women “regularly witnessed the degradation and humiliation of the subjugated population, of non-Jews as well as Jews, and the systematic murder of the Jews became widely, if not universally, known.”¹²⁸ Maschmann even found herself involved in this degradation and humiliation. During her time in the east, an SS officer ordered her and her camp girls to assist with the expulsion of the Poles. It was her duty to supervise the packing of Polish farming carts. The SS allowed Poles to take only what would fit into the cart. Maschmann made many of the Polish families unpack their carts so she could determine that the Poles were cheating and

¹²⁷ Maschmann, *Account Rendered*, 32.

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Harvey, “‘We Forgot All Jews and Poles’: German Women and the ‘Ethnic Struggle’ in Nazi-occupied Poland,” *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 3 (2001), 448.

stealing from their German superiors. She even used a coat hanger as a weapon in her acts of racism.¹²⁹ If she felt sympathy for the Polish families, she thought of her love of the *Volk*.

Maschmann used her racial superiority to scare Polish families as well. When one particular German woman came into Poland, she had nothing. Her husband had volunteered for the army and left her with eight children. Maschmann's Nazi indoctrination taught her this German women needed her help. Maschmann forged a letter stating that all Polish families had to relinquish furniture and kitchen equipment. She stated the Polish families "cannot have understood what the 'letter from the Kreisleiter' was all about. I could tell from their terror that they feared I had come to inform them of their forthcoming expulsion, and so they were relieved when I only went to the kitchen cupboard and took three of their seven or eight spoons."¹³⁰ She also stole mattresses from the Polish families and only realized many years later the extreme mistreatment of the Polish people.

The Nazi educated girls considered higher education and scholarship to be a masculine advantage—unless women were "destined by 'hereditary' or 'character' to do so."¹³¹ The Nazis needed educated women for the racial programs though.¹³² Female doctors, like Doctor Herta Oberheuser, assisted in many of the racial programs like the sterilization and T4 program and in the Nazi camps. Nazi officials appointed Oberheuser to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. At

¹²⁹ Maschmann, *Account Rendered*, 121.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 128.

¹³¹ Anna Maria Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, trans. NDE Publishing (Richmond Hill: NDE Publishing, 1998), 116. Scholtz-Klink agreed with the idea of education for men only, but she did appeal to Martin Bormann on behalf of some women she thought were exceptional. Her appeals for these women went unanswered.

¹³² Although not selected to be the perfect Nazi woman, women of the lower class found a place in the Nazi regime. Most often, these women were the guards in the camps. These women were often from the lower rural class and poorly educated. Although the rural woman was the standard of the Nazis, these women were often violent in the camps. Irma Grese was an example of this type of woman. She was poorly educated, but was a fanatical Nazi. While a guard at the Auschwitz camp, she was described as deriving sexual pleasure from watching doctors experiment on women without the use of anesthetic. Sonja Maria Hedgepeth, *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 187.

the camp, she murdered children then experimented on their corpses, as well as experimented on live prisoners. She stated that being a woman had nothing to do with her value as a National Socialist. She believed men and women were equals in the National Socialist cause.¹³³ Although educated beyond Nazi standards for women, Oberheuser was an ideal Nazi woman.

Hitler and the Nazis needed other educated women as well, like secretaries, social workers, and nurses. Secretaries worked closely in the camps and made decisions based on camp files. These women sorted files and assisted in the selection of those prisoners who would live and those who would die. They worked in the camps and were some of the largest female contributors of Nazi racial programs. Himmler created a program for clerical workers known as the *SS-Frauenkorps*. This program allowed women to work with the SS in the murder of millions of people. Although many of the women did not see the murders personally, they joined the SS men and held knowledge of the murders. Historian Wendy Lower also explained she found some secretaries who benefited greatly from the destruction of the Jews. She stated that Sabine Dick was one of these women. These women took advantage of all of the belongings stolen from deported Jews. Dick went even as far as stealing a dress (and even wedding rings) from a farmhouse that contained stolen Jewish items. Lower stated, women like Dick “were at the very center of the Nazi murder machinery, and they, like many others, chose to benefit from their proximity to power, plundering in depraved ways.”¹³⁴ Some secretaries were involved with “desk murders” of the Third Reich. Although they did not see the murders, they were equally guilty of murdering during the Holocaust.

¹³³ Martyn Whittock, *The Third Reich: The Rise and Fall of the Nazis* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2011), 164.

¹³⁴ Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 112.

SS wives belonged to a special group of people; they represented the ultimate Nazi nobility. They were determined to be the nobility of the Aryan race, and many of the women took advantage of this status. They were the elite and ideal women of the Third Reich; they passed all of the health laws and married into the Nazi Party. They met each of the Nazi ideals for women. They followed their husbands on excursions and had children. They understood the need for the “separate spheres” for men and women, but many of the SS wives found they could improve themselves further by entering into German annexed territories and taking part in evacuations. Because SS units tried to keep the women away from the sights of the evacuations of the Jews and Poles, often times wives joined husbands directly after the procedures were finished and the former occupants removed. Wives and girlfriends of the SS sometimes witnessed this expulsion though and some even profited from it. Once ordered for deportation, the Jews and Poles lost most of their belongings. This led to German looting of the homes and even the exchange of small amounts of food for jewels, furs, furniture, and art from prisoners.¹³⁵ Some women did not even offer food; they just stole from the victims, even though Hitler did not condone these actions. The Nazis considered all Jewish and Polish belongings government property, but looting was “the biggest campaign of organized robbery and exploitation in history, and German women were among its prime agents and beneficiaries.”¹³⁶

Concentration and death camps also contained the Nazi female nobility. These women were often the wives of commandants or other officials in the camp. Many times the women lived in a secluded area, away from the violence of the camps, but some women involved themselves with the action in the camps. In the Buchenwald camp, Ilse Koch travelled through

¹³⁵ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 403.

¹³⁶ Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 101.

the camp on horseback and beat prisoners with her riding crop. Many of Buchenwald's prisoners remember Koch. Rumors abounded that, not only did she beat the prisoners unmercifully, and enjoyed it, but that she also was interested in tattooed prisoners. One prisoner observed, although he could not say that Koch specifically requested the actual items, human skin lampshades and book-bindings in the camp and the Koch's house.¹³⁷ The fact that she loved harsh punishment and the rumors of human skin household decorations earned her the nickname of the "Bitch of Buchenwald."

One role the Nazis believed ideal for women was social work. The Nazis considered social work as woman's work and needed women to fulfill the positions. They believed that the female nurturing trait assisted with this work. Families trusted female social workers and allowed them into family homes. Once in the home, the social worker observed the family and determined whether a child met the criteria for sterilization. During a meeting of senior social workers in Hamburg in 1937, leaders explained the vital importance of female social workers and their involvement in hereditary health measures. Leaders recommended each social worker should bring forth at least one case for sterilization each month for a total of ten cases annually.¹³⁸

Social workers recommended children, but the Nazis also found unfit mothers to be "life of worthy of life" as well. Women were the carriers of the next generation, therefore, the Nazis believed, inferior women needed to be sterilized. Women constituted over seventy-five percent

¹³⁷ Although many of the inmates could not verify Ilse Koch actually ordered the tattooed human skin items, many of the prisoners remembered the "pathological department" where tattooed prisoners were taken to determine whether a tattooed person showed any criminal inclinations because of tattooing. Flint Whitlock, *The Beasts of Buchenwald: Karl and Ilse Koch, Human-Skin Lampshades, and the War Crimes Trial of the Century* (Brule: Cable Publishing, 2011), 1.

¹³⁸ Social workers considered ten months a year in this case because of holidays and sick leave. Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 176.

of the fatalities of sterilization procedures. Even before the Nazis began their sterilization programs, many believed the woman caused the hereditary defects among the younger generation; therefore, more women than men faced sterilization. The Nazis claimed women passed on hereditary traits to children that excluded them from the Aryan race. Many, including Nazi women, considered these women liberated from raising undesirable children.

Female social workers also recommended prostitutes for sterilization. These social workers assisted in the dismantling of brothels and introduced alternatives for prostitutes. Female social workers were deemed gentler than the male police, but they also “calmly stripped women of their legal autonomy, incarcerated and sterilized them and, perhaps, indirectly sign their death warrants.”¹³⁹ Social workers chose these victims from the poorer classes. Household servants, unskilled laborers, and unmarried mothers often faced the courts. Any woman who was not the ideal German woman suffered because, “this ideal was represented by the worker who performed ungrudging housework and efficient labor in outside employment; her antithesis was the slut, the prostitute.”¹⁴⁰ These women faced serious consequences by going against the ideal of the perfect Nazi woman. Prostitution did not disappear because the Nazis believed these women amoral.

Just like social work, the Nazis considered nursing “woman’s work” because of female nurturing abilities. Educated nurses were vitally important to racial programs in the Third Reich. Even before the passage of the Nuremberg laws, the Nazis set up sterilization programs for “life

¹³⁹ Victoria Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich: Prostitutes in German Society, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 191.

¹⁴⁰ Although prostitutes were considered asocial and deemed candidates for sterilization, the Nazis could not rid Germany of the occupation. The Nazis sent prostitutes to camps, but in many areas, these women were sent to state created brothels. These brothels were especially important during the war because the Nazis kept watch on the spread of disease as well as provide a monitored sexual outlet for soldiers. Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in *When Biology Became Destiny*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984): 414 and Hans Peter Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany* ed. Heinrich Fraenkel trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (New York: Dorset Press, 1973) 225-27.

unworthy of life.” These programs “purified” the Aryan race by sterilizing the mentally ill, criminals, and other asocials. The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, passed July 14, 1933, allowed Nazi doctors to sterilize “burdens” to the state. As Gerhard Wagner explained, the law has “seen to it that in the future the inferior will not be able to produce more inferior children, saving the German people from a steady stream of new genetic and economic burdens.”¹⁴¹ Nazi minister of the interior Wilhelm Frick suggested that twenty percent of the population needed sterilization.¹⁴² Nazi health courts determined sterilization conditions. The courts and the law defined nine hereditary causes for sterilization: congenital feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, manic-depressive illness, hereditary epilepsy, Huntingdon’s Chorea, hereditary blindness, deafness, severe physical deformity, and alcoholism. Although Frick desperately believed in sterilizing the “unfit,” Hitler rarely mentioned the sterilization programs, most likely because he knew he would face opposition.

Sterilization laws also led to euthanasia programs, especially the T4 Euthanasia Program, which began in 1939. Euthanasia programs, considered “mercy” killings, aimed to rid Germany of “useless eaters.” Before the war in 1939, Hitler authorized a children’s euthanasia program. This program organized by Doctors Karl Brandt and Philipp Bouhler selected children and sent them to special clinics where personnel starved them to death, gave them lethal injections, or chose them for medical experiments. By the summer of 1939, Hitler authorized Doctor Leonard

¹⁴¹ Gerhard Wagner, speech given at Nuremberg Rally, 11 September 1936, in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. and trans. Randall L. Bytwerk (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 72.

¹⁴² Although Frick suggested twenty percent, sterilizations affected about .5 percent of the German population (about 400,000 people). Doctors and nurses administered most sterilization procedures without consent and against the patient’s will. ¹⁴² Doris L. Bergen *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 62.

Conti to create a similar program for adults.¹⁴³ Euthanasia doctors did not specifically choose women over men as victims for the Euthanasia and T4 programs, but studies found women did play a role in these programs, especially as doctors and nurses. The program employed doctors and nurses who would select, based on medical records, the handicapped and disabled patients from hospitals and asylums. Once chosen, doctors and nurses sent patients to one of six T4 killing centers: Grafeneck, Brandenburg, Hartheim, Sonnenstein, Bernburg, or Hadamar. Upon arrival, the patients entered into gas chambers disguised as shower rooms. Euthanasia programs murdered over 70,000 people the Nazis considered “useless eaters.”

Nurse Berta Netz worked in a mental institution used for euthanasia programs. In the fall of 1942, Frau Doctor Wernicke ordered the isolation of a mentally unstable woman. Once sent to the “isolation room,” Netz injected the patient with a near-lethal dose of morphine for fourteen days, until the patient died. After her initial patient, Netz administered the same dose to more and more patients. Although she claimed she only followed the instruction of her superiors, she stated, “As a nurse in mental institutions for many years, I really did see it in some respects as a relief that the most seriously ill patients were released from their suffering by inducing their deaths.”¹⁴⁴ Similarly, as with other Germans involved in Holocaust programs, Netz believed her “mercy killings” were only for the seriously ill.

Netz was not the only woman in the T4 program and not the only woman involved in the racial proceedings of Nazi Germany. After Hitler officially ended the T4 program, “wild euthanasia” began. This was the continuance of the T4 program, but Hitler did not *officially*

¹⁴³ Because of the outrage from the clergy and German citizens, Hitler wanted the T4 program to remain secret. When the clergy and the German public learned of the euthanasia programs, the backlash was extreme. In August of 1941, Hitler ordered the official end to the euthanasia program. Programs continued as “wild euthanasia.”

¹⁴⁴ Testimony of Nurse Berta Netz, Munich 1962, in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, ed. Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkle (London: Routledge, 2002), 334.

endorsed the continuation of the program. Women found a role in these new euthanasia programs as well. Between 1941 and 1945, female nurses assisted directly in the killing process. Like Netz, some nurses claimed they were only following orders. As Matthew Stibbe stated, although some nurses requested transfers, many “undoubtedly felt uncomfortable with doing what they were asked to do, but continued to follow orders out of a sense of duty or deference to their superiors, a phenomenon doubtless reinforced by the gendered hierarchy within the medical profession.”¹⁴⁵ Netz stated this was the reason for her involvement in the euthanasia programs. Some women did feel comfortable with killing though. The T4 killing brought female nurses and physicians into the race war but also allowed other women into the program as well. Social workers decided whom to send to the killing camps, and even midwives were encouraged to report birth-defected children to the courts.¹⁴⁶

Because only race and mental issues concerned the Nazis, female homosexuality did not concern them. Although considered asocial and appropriate for sterilization, female homosexuals were virtually ignored. Homosexuality in the Third Reich meant severe punishment for gay men, but lesbians did not face the same consequences, mainly because many Nazi leaders believed these women could be “re-educated” to become the mothers of Germany. Through motherhood programs and propaganda, these women were re-educated to the specified way of life. Unlike gay men, lesbians were “pseudo-homosexuals” because lesbians could still have “normal intercourse.”¹⁴⁷ A letter from the Reich Ministry of Justice explained, because of women’s lower place in society and employment, their sexual preferences did not concern the Reich as much as men’s preferences. The letter continued: “Finally, women who indulge in unnatural sexual

¹⁴⁵ Matthew Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 76.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 76.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 51.

relations are not lost forever as procreative factors in the same way that homosexual men are, for experience shows that they later often resume normal relationships.”¹⁴⁸ Women who did not conform to these “normal relationships” felt ostracized from society though and faced deportation to concentration camps. Many gay women (as well as gay men) avoided suspicion and punishment though, because many chose to marry into heterosexual relationships.¹⁴⁹

As historian Robert Gellately observed, citizens were actively involved with the Third Reich through denunciations. He stated, “Providing information to the police or the Party was one of the most important contributions of citizen involvement in the Third Reich.”¹⁵⁰ These citizens helped the Nazis control Germany by informing the Gestapo of any suspicious activity.¹⁵¹ Denunciations were the way for German women, who may or may not have supported the Nazis, to be involved in Nazi racial hatred. Especially during World War II, women found many reasons to denounce other citizens. Racial concerns were one aspect of women denouncers’ involvement of the Third Reich, and women used this to their advantage. Racism was not one of the initial concerns of women denouncers, but these women used race as a means to denounce. If denounced in a relationship with a Jew, a person faced serious

¹⁴⁸ “No persecution of lesbians,” letter from the Reich Ministry of Justice, June 18, 1942, in *Women in Nazi Germany*, Stephenson (Essex: Pearson Education, 2001), 152.

¹⁴⁹ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 53.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 261.

¹⁵¹ The Gestapo took allegations seriously, but many people used denunciations for their own selfish purposes, and although many believed women to be the main culprits of Nazi denouncers, historian Eric Johnson stated the male population had a higher percentage of denouncers. He stated that the typical denouncer was male, middle-aged, and middle-class. Historian Richard J. Evans also discovered women to be in a small proportion of denouncers. Often male denouncers overheard information in pubs and other places women were barred from entering. He also claimed that even if women did overhear information, they often left it to their husbands to report. Recent studies by Johnson, as well as historians Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann and Klaus Marxen, found, even during the war years, men still outweighed women denouncers. Eric Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 368-69, Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 100-01.

consequences. The Aryan partner faced a prison sentence, and the Jewish partner deported. If a woman even saw a neighbor fraternizing with a Jewish person, it could result in a denouncement.

Relationships with foreign workers allowed women to denounce other people but also made women victims because relations with foreign workers could also be a cause for denouncements. One woman took it upon herself to stop illegal behavior among Germans and foreigners. She noticed that every Sunday a German man stopped and spoke to a Polish woman. The woman accused Eberhard Schröder of using explicit language and making sexual remarks to a Polish woman. Although neither the female denouncer, nor the Gestapo, could find proof of sexual relations between the two, Schröder lost his job as a supervisor in a local factory and was sentenced to twenty-one days of “protective custody.”¹⁵² Denouncers did not exempt German women in relationships with foreigners either. Another woman accused Gertrud Wunder of having an affair with a Polish worker. When Wunder admitted to her affair, the Gestapo sent her to the Ravensbrück camp for women.¹⁵³

When Germany entered the war, men left to join the fight. Hitler and the Nazis needed workers to replace the absent men, so Hitler and the Nazis introduced foreign workers into Germany. Because women remained in Germany during the war, some women had relationships—not always sexual—with the foreign workers. Foreign workers assisted women on their farms or businesses; women desired relationships or intimacy, or even felt pity for the mistreatment of the workers.¹⁵⁴ These relationships left women open for denunciations though. Often times, the denouncer did not agree with the relationship and denounced the persons

¹⁵² Evans, *Third Reich in Power*, 101.

¹⁵³ Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, 164-65

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Heinemann, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 57.

involved. As many historians discovered, women denounced Jewish or foreign relationships but not for racial reasons. Women used the Nazi racial beliefs and concerns to their advantage.

Anti-Semitic newspapers like *Der Stürmer* published accusations against Jewish people. Julius Streicher, founder of the newspaper, created a “Letter Box” column that published letters from Germans denouncing Jewish “crimes.” True or not, the column and the letters allowed ordinary Germans the phrases, vocabulary, and criminal categories for denouncing others.¹⁵⁵ German women who had previously been friends with Jewish women turned on their Jewish friends. These women wrote letters to the paper about “Jewish mischief” or “lack of racial pride” among women who supported Jewish businesses.¹⁵⁶

Denouncers may not have been members of the Nazi Party, but they used the Party to their own advantages. A student denounced a female teacher for telling a joke to her students that many wrongly construed as an offense to Hitler and the Nazis. Once arrested the Gestapo ordered her to pay a fine. She also lost her job with the school.¹⁵⁷ The denouncer turned her into the Gestapo because she was unpopular among the students, not for political reasons. Some women used Party politics to denounce husbands also. Husbands who drank too much or abused their wives faced inquiry from the Gestapo. Historian Vandana Joshi studied case files from the Nazi era of wives denouncing their husbands. In one case a man verbally and physically abused his wife. So she would receive police protection from him, she denounced her husband to the Gestapo.¹⁵⁸ Many of the other cases found battered wives as denouncers of husbands. Joshi’s

¹⁵⁵ Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 230-31.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 231

¹⁵⁷ Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 268.

¹⁵⁸ Vandana Joshi, “The ‘Private’ became ‘Public’: Wives as Denouncers in the Third Reich,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 3 (July 2002): 425.

subjects did not report husbands to the Gestapo for political reasons; instead, they found protection among the Nazis against abusive husbands.

If the Nazis mistreated ideal Aryan women, Jewish women were not nothing to them. Jewish women were not even citizens of Germany. The Nuremberg laws determined the citizenship of these women. Jewish women, considered German citizens before the passage of the Nuremberg laws, lived peacefully in Germany. The belief that the German people were the master race permeated the policies and attitudes of not only Nazi leaders and supporters but many German citizens as well. In the early years of Hitler's reign, the Nazis passed the Nuremberg laws, which defined citizenship in Germany. The Reich Citizenship laws stated Jews and those who were not of "German-blood" were no longer German citizens. The Nazis especially feared for intermarriage between Jews and Reich citizens. For this reason the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor passed in September 1935. The Nazis forbid marriage between Jews and German citizens, and any intercourse between Jews and Germans was punishable by fines and deportation. Another provision of the laws stated, Jews were forbidden from employing German women under the age of 45 in their households.¹⁵⁹ This came from the belief that the "evil" Jew would harm the young, innocent Christian woman, an idea held by many Christians long before Hitler.

Because the Nazis viewed a Jews as enemies, the laws did not specifically focus on women. The Nuremberg laws affected all of the Jews of Germany (and later in German annexed territories). Hitler and the Nazis did not take murderous measures with the first passage of the Nuremberg laws. The laws made being a Jew in Germany difficult, but many Jews accepted

¹⁵⁹ "The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor" in *Sources of the Holocaust*, ed. Steve Hochstadt (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 44.

them, believing that, although second-class citizens, peace with the Germans was possible.¹⁶⁰ By the late 1930s and the approach of war, the treatment of the Jews in Germany became harsher, with many Jews sent to ghettos and eventually work and death camps.

Jewish women were mothers and caretakers, but the Nazis defined them as less worthy than Aryan German women. Although their children were German and went to school with other German children, the Nazis decided that these Jewish women did not fit the ideal Nazi woman, and the Nazis went to great lengths to prove this. With laws, programs, and the destruction of six million people, the Nazis tried to convince the world of the inferiority of the world Jewish population.

Jewish women suffered the consequences of Nazi racial policies. Jewish women, no longer considered German citizens, could no longer shop in German citizen owned shops or see German physicians. Many Jewish households altered routines because women lost German household employees to the laws. With the passage of the laws, Hitler turned the German people hostile to the Jewish population and women suffered. After World War II, Ilse B, a Nazi survivor, explained the hatred of Jews by the Germans: “The Jewish people had a lot of money. They had brains and were intelligent. The Jewish people were hard workers. The others weren’t; they were dumb. The Germans are dumb; they still are.”¹⁶¹ She stated the “Germans” were jealous of the Jews and that was the reason for Jewish persecution.

Jews and Germans shared concerns after the Nuremberg laws because the Nazi outlawed all relations between Jews and Aryans. The offenses against these laws varied from

¹⁶⁰ Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982), 112.

¹⁶¹ Cynthia Crane, *Divided Lives: The Untold Stories of Jewish Christian Women in Nazi Germany* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 217.

embarrassment to deportation. On one occasion the Gestapo ordered a woman and her Jewish boyfriend to wear signs on the street. Her sign read “I am the biggest pig in the place and go around only with Jews,” while his read, “As a Jewish boy I only take German girls to my room.”¹⁶² Women lost friends with the establishment of the anti-Jewish measures. German women ostracized Jewish women who once belonged to the community. This caused anxiety and fear about being Jewish.¹⁶³ Even non-practicing Jewish women feared Jewish labels. Once labeled, a “J” was stamped on their identification cards and many women had to change their birth names to the Jewish name “Sara.” Eventually all Jews had to wear the yellow star to identify themselves.

Reichsfrauenführerin Gertrud Scholtz-Klink supposedly stood for the women of Germany, but with the Nuremberg laws she excluded Jewish women. Like other Nazi leaders, she believed Jews to be subhuman and she warned Aryan women about the negative effects the Jewish population had on Germany. She warned women that the Jews were the mortal enemies of Germany and wanted to destroy the German nation.¹⁶⁴ Because women were the main consumers of the household, she ordered women to stop buying Jewish goods, shopping in Jewish stores, and even dismiss Jewish doctors. After *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass)¹⁶⁵, Nazi women, Scholtz-Klink included, benefited from the destruction of Jewish livelihood. She used the *NS-Frauenschaft* to transfer stolen money from Jews to the ethnic German settlers in the East. Jewish mother Erna Segal appealed to Scholtz-Klink for aid from high taxes placed on

¹⁶²Doris L. Bergen *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 58.

¹⁶³ Marion Kaplan, “Jewish Women in Nazi Germany: Daily Life and Daily Struggles, 1933-1939,” *Feminist Studies* 16 no. 3 (Fall 1990), 5.

¹⁶⁴ Anna Maria Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, trans. NDE Publishing (Richmond Hill: NDE Publishing, 1998), 118.

¹⁶⁵ *Kristallnacht* was a nationwide pogrom against the Jews of Germany on November 9, 1938.

Jews, but instead of aid, Scholtz-Klink sent a worker to collect the family's valuables with a promise to pay within four weeks. The full payment never came to the family though.¹⁶⁶

While Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and other Nazi women preached the value of German motherhood, Jewish mothers felt fear, fear for their own lives, but especially for their children. Before 1938, when the Nazis barred public school attendance, Jewish children remained in public schools. They faced hardships, especially from teacher and classmates. Jewish children faced exclusion from school events and violence. A letter from *Jüdischer Frauenbund* went to Scholtz-Klink and the Nazi Women's League relating the problems Jewish children faced. The letter stated that Jewish mothers did not expect the *NS-Frauenschaft* to change the fate of the Jews but wanted to express the concerns of the mothers for their children. "We have no recommendation to make or plans to present to you, but we call upon the shared motherly responsibilities for the dignity and protection of every living being."¹⁶⁷ The hate and contempt being taught to the German youth also concerned the mothers, and "therefore we, the mothers of the children whose right to live is threatened, come to you, the mothers of the children who, from the seed planted in them today, shall someday build German life and the German state."¹⁶⁸ The letter to Scholtz-Klink never received a reply, which showed the concern Nazi mothers had for Jewish mothers.

The Nuremberg laws defined *Mischlinge* as well. *Mischlinge* were "mixed blood" and divided into two groups. A decree in November 1935 took the marriage law further and defined the *Mischlinge*, or "mixed-blood" Jew. Nazi policy defined *Mischlinge* as anyone who was

¹⁶⁶ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 403.

¹⁶⁷ "Jüdischer Frauenbund letter to Gertrud Scholtz-Klink," November 8, 1934, in *Jewish Responses to Persecution Volume I 1933-38*, ed. Jürgen Matthäus and Mark Roseman and trans. Stephen Pallavicini and Gina Tumbarello (Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2010), 103.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 103.

descended from one or two Jewish grandparents. First degree *Mischlinge* were “half Jew” and had at least two Jewish grandparents. Second degree were “quarter Jew” and had one Jewish grandparent. The laws also defined the “privileged” and “non-privileged” *Mischlinge*. After December 1938, a “privileged” family had a Jewish mother or children (raised as Christian) under the ages of eighteen, while a “non-privileged” family had a Jewish father, raised their children as Jews, or had no children.¹⁶⁹ Whether privileged or non-privileged, women suffered from this label. In an interview, Ursula Randt admitted schoolmates liked her and she had friends but never felt as she belonged. “When I was treated with kindness and had friends, I was still somehow in an extreme outsider situation. I also had the feeling that I always had to behave exceptionally well because I was really only tolerated. I had the feeling I could be called away at any moment that somebody could throw me out or fire me at any time because I was tolerated only out of grace and mercy.”¹⁷⁰

Hitler and the Nazis founded German National Socialism based on the belief in a perfect German race. They defined race with the Nuremberg laws and persecuted the Jewish and gypsy population. They chose the “useless eaters” and made decisions and laws concerning the sterilization of many citizens. The perfect Nazi woman played a large role in these racist policies. Although women could not create political laws, they supported the ones made by the men of the regime. They followed the rules and even chose the people who they considered deserved sterilization or even death. The women in the T4 program focused on the “good they were doing for Germany” by ridding Germany of the people who cost the state money. Nurses and doctors considered themselves liberators of people who only suffered during life. Eventually,

¹⁶⁹ Crane, *Divided Lives*, 29.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 197.

when the T4 program ended, these same female nurses and doctors went into concentration and death camps. Through the T4 program, they perfected the mass execution of people. They were integral to the camps. They beat and murdered prisoners and lived up to the racial violence of the Nazis. Wives of the SS members also benefited from the violence of Nazi racial politics. The wives may not have witnessed the executions of Jews and others victims, but they took advantage of them just the same. They stole Jewish goods and plundered Jewish homes once the Jews were deported. Women even took advantage of Jewish deaths by stealing clothes, goods, jewelry, and even gold teeth. Women also took advantage of the resettlement schemes of the Nazis. The Nazis sent women into the East to help resettle ethnic Germans in places like Poland. Again, women did not see much of the violence against the Poles and Jews but did take advantage of opportunities this violence created. These women did not physically participate in deportations but did use them to their own advantages. Denouncers turned enemies and even husbands into the Gestapo for breaking Nazi race laws. Jewish women suffered ultimately from Nazi persecution. Jewish women who had friends before the Nazi rise to power lost and feared those friends after the passage of the Nuremberg laws. Because they were Jewish, they held no rights and could not be German citizens.

The Nazis contradicted the role of the perfect Nazi women in race relations. They wanted women who had children and followed the rules of husbands and the Party. The men of the Party wanted to keep women away from the violence of Jewish deportations and death but allowed women to work in camps as guards and secretaries. The Nazis obsessed about the race of the German *Volk* and needed women in the private roles for the success of this obsession.

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN, WAR, AND THE FAILURE OF THE THIRD REICH: MORALE AND MOBILIZATION DURING WORLD WAR II

The Nazis wanted women as morale builders, but many of the actions taken by the regime lessened women's beliefs in the Party. The Nazis feared a backlash from conscription of women into the labor force, so they did not mobilize women fully during the war. By not conscripting upper and middle class women into the workforce, the Nazis angered women who had to work. The Nazis also provided the same incentives for unmarried women who were pregnant as women who were married before the war. Women who were not married but had children with soldiers had the same advantages as married women. The issue of foreign workers confused women in Germany. The Nazis preached "racial purity" in Germany, but brought more than seven million foreign workers into Germany. These workers interacted with the women who remained on the home front while husbands and sons went to war. The Nazis feared sexual relations between foreign workers and Aryan women and dealt harsh punishments for those found guilty of relations. The SS carried out punishments and many times the punishments were extreme. The SS publically humiliated German women for these relations. Even if women did not have sexual relations with foreign workers and they were just friends, they could still suffer for those relationships.

Sexist punishments also hurt the morale of women on the home front. The Nazis did not approve of relations between men and foreign workers but did not punish men. The harsh punishment hurt morale among women who did not see the need for such severe treatment. The Nazis eventually turned on their own people because they feared a loss of morale, and this meant problems for women. Not only did women in the resistance movement experience hardships, but

the average German woman did as well. Again, this treatment caused a loss of faith in the Nazi government. The Nazis caused resentment among women because they did not treat all women equally. For all of these reasons, Hitler and the Nazis, while fearing the domestic unrest they thought had caused the collapse in 1918, created their own version of a “stab in the back.”

The historiography of women during World War II has changed. Many early historians viewed Germany critically during the war. The (alleged) failure of Hitler and the Nazis to mobilize women was the main critique. Foreign workers made up much of the labor force during the war, but women were, in fact, a large part of the labor force before World War II. By 1942, there were very few women left to mobilize and Hitler did not want to offend these women. The Nazis did not want to offend the upper and middle class women for fear of a loss of morale. Hitler and the Nazis were mindful of disgruntled, conscripted women workers during the First World War. They feared a repeat of the negative impact on morale “when striking women munitions workers had contributed greatly to the spread of anti-war feeling and the collapse of morale on the home front.”¹⁷¹ Unfortunately, the Nazis, while attempting to care for upper and middle class women, ignored a significant portion of the female population, those of the working class and lower class. Historians also studied rural women in the work force. When husbands and sons left for war, women had to run the farming operations. The Nazis believed these women should be the ideal for which all German women strived, but the Nazis did not offer assistance for rural women. The Nazis tried the *Pflichtjahr* and the Labor Service scheme for agricultural

¹⁷¹Matthew Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich* (London: Arnold, 2003), 95.

assistance, but both of these failed and assisted little in the agricultural work for women.¹⁷²

Rural women found foreign workers more valuable than either of these Nazi programs.

The role of women during the bombing of Germany has also received attention from historians. Because most German cities were populated with women, women suffered the most from bombings. Jörg Friedrich observed, by October 1944, women's nerves were "strained to the limit."¹⁷³ Women could not sleep; many did not change even out of their day clothes. When alarms did sound, women collected family members and ran to the nearest shelter. When the bombings ended women returned to homes that were destroyed or in ruins. Many lost homes and had to move often, and many sent children away from the cities into the countryside. Eventually the urban women left the cities and moved into the countryside. This caused friction between the urban women and rural women. Urban women did not understand the hard-working rural women, and the rural women did not understand why urban women did not have the same work ethic.

Even after Hitler and many of the Nazi leaders committed suicide or disappeared, women still suffered from Nazi crimes. The Red Army and the other Allied armies believed the women of Germany needed to atone for Nazi violence during the war. This meant that the incoming soldiers raped millions of German women. Some of these soldiers were very violent and not only raped the women but also tortured them.¹⁷⁴ All women were victims of these crimes, from the elderly to the very young. Allied soldiers even raped women in front of German men. For Soviet

¹⁷² Adam Tooze, *Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Viking, 2006), 358. Jill Stephenson, "Women's Labor Service in Nazi Germany," *Central European History* 15 no. 3 (Sep 1982): 241-65.

¹⁷³ Jörg Friedrich, *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany 1940-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 438.

¹⁷⁴ Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 710-11.

men, the raping of German women proved German men could not “intervene to alter the fate of their women, or by extension, their nation.”¹⁷⁵

Historians agree that part of the failure of Hitler and the Nazis during World War II was the lack of mobilization of women. The Nazis, Hitler especially, did not want to order women into the workforce though. Hitler’s obsession with the First World War and Germany’s “stab in the back” frightened him away from conscripting women into the workforce, at least until 1943. During the First World War, German leaders conscripted women into the labor force and placed them in unsafe environments and paid them significantly lower wages than male counterparts, which led to strikes and unrest.¹⁷⁶ This unrest and resentment among women caused a loss in morale on the home front, which affected the men on the battlefield. The loss of morale on the battlefield severely damaged the war effort for Germany. For this reason, Hitler viewed conscripting women during World War II out of the question. Although he did eventually approve measures for conscripting women, the war was no longer in Germany’s favor and women found many ways of evading the measures. Because the Nazis did not conscript women in the beginning of the war, it caused resentment among the women who had worked long before the war began.

Even before the start of the war, more German women participated in the labor force than in any other country in Europe except Russia. In the first year of the war fourteen million German women were in the labor force, six million women worked in peasant agriculture and another two million in industry, and the rest labored in several other occupations like office

¹⁷⁵ Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg: Hitler’s War of Extermination in the East* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2011), 452.

¹⁷⁶ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 95, Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 331.

workers, welfare agents, health service professionals, and teachers.¹⁷⁷ The women in the labor force before the Nazi invasion of Poland could not easily be mobilized for war work because many were already working in important sectors. Women who did not work and could be mobilized remained outside of the labor force, especially women of the upper and middle classes.

Nazi propaganda soon focused on women as mothers *and* as workers. Magazine advertisements proclaimed, “We see the woman as the eternal mother of our people, but also as the working and fighting comrade of man!”¹⁷⁸ Some German women gladly worked and fought as comrades to men. Some women joined the Wehrmacht or the Corps of Female Auxiliaries. These women worked as secretaries, radio operators, and nurses. Nazi leaders attempted to exclude women from combat, but many served in combat situations. Women preformed in anti-aircraft defenses. Some women made names for themselves. For example, Hanna Reitsch, a test pilot during World War II, received the Iron Cross First Class from Hitler. She was also one of the last people to see Hitler alive in 1945.¹⁷⁹

The role of women as morale keepers was important to the Nazis; therefore, they did not want to order upper and middle class women into war industries, especially after they had spent years convincing women to remain in the home. For this reason, the Nazis asked women to volunteer for the war effort. Propaganda focused on women who joined the war effort in support of husbands and sons. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, Nazi Women’s Leader, described women war

¹⁷⁷ Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 358.

¹⁷⁸ Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany: A History* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1988), 243.

¹⁷⁹ Although her partner General Robert Ritter von Greim chose to commit suicide, Reitsch did not. She served as a witness to the last days in the Berlin Chancellery bunker. Bernard A. Cook, *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present Vol. I* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 491.

workers, not only as secretaries and clerks, but also soldiers for the Führer.¹⁸⁰ Articles and letters appeared in women's magazines, some written by Scholtz-Klink, which described the role of women during the war as mothers and caretakers and as women fighting on the home front to take care of husbands and sons on the front lines. In an effort to provide models to emulate, stories appeared of heroic women during the First World War. These women did not fight on the battlefield alongside men but stood firmly behind the husbands and sons sent off to war. Nazi publications featured courageous women who did not give into despair after hearing of the death of a loved one and kept the family together and healthy even during trying economic times. If women did join in the war mission, they did as caretakers of the family. If women worked in munitions factories, they supplied the nation's men with the weapons they needed to survive in battle, or if women worked as air-raid wardens, they did so to protect the German family.¹⁸¹ Though these stories were noble and showed the ideal nature of women, propaganda failed to convince large numbers of women to enter into the labor force voluntarily. As historian Leila Rupp observed, "The failure of mobilization was primarily the consequence of the lack of response from women to the demands of the regime."¹⁸²

The demands of the regime were often times hard to determine because of the propaganda surrounding the role of women in the labor force. As historian Jill Stephenson observed, Hitler and the Nazis did not want to jeopardize the health of Aryan German women, since in a racial state they played key biological roles, but Hitler also believed unskilled, unwilling, and inexperienced women were useless, especially in compensating for skilled male

¹⁸⁰ Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, trans. NDE Publishing (Richmond Hill: NDE Publishing, 1998), 121.

¹⁸¹ Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 360.

¹⁸² Leila Rupp, "Women, Class, and Mobilization in Nazi Germany," *Science and Society* 43 (1979): 52.

laborers.¹⁸³ As the war progressed, the required six-month Labor Service turned to one year because the young women entered into auxiliary work but maintained the traditional camp life. This created confusion that Germany was not suffering from a national emergency even though there was a national emergency.¹⁸⁴

Hitler also wanted to avoid the alleged “stab in the back” suffered in the First World War; accordingly, he did not want to create discontent and defeatism among the men fighting by ordering wives and daughters into the labor force. Fears of “stab in the back” forced Hitler and the Nazis to encourage women to volunteer for war employment. Voluntary employment failed though. Reports from various areas in Germany related that of the hundreds of women invited to recruitment meetings very few women actually attended, and even fewer women had positive responses to the efforts. One such report stated women “who are as yet not employed are showing no more enthusiasm for work than formerly,” and that “the population expects women from the higher level of society to show a good example.”¹⁸⁵ The high society women did not set a good example though because many found reasons to avoid work.

While Hitler and the Nazis praised women for volunteering—the few who did—for war work, they virtually ignored the women who already worked in factories and industries. When the Nazis did listen to the complaints of working women, the results often backfired. For example, working women complained of the long lines at stores after they finished shifts. The Nazis encouraged non-employed women to shop during the day so the lines would be shorter in the evenings. This angered the workers because the non-employed women received newer goods

¹⁸³ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 56.

¹⁸⁴ Jill Stephenson, “Women’s Labor Service in Nazi Germany,” *Central European History* 15 no. 3 (Sep 1982): 264.

¹⁸⁵ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 156-57.

first.¹⁸⁶ This caused even more resentment from the employed women in Germany and undermined the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The Women's Labor Service attempted to provide for the women in the labor force by offering incentives concerning childcare and working hours. The Law for the Protection of Mothers in Gainful Employment, passed in May 1942, created legislation to provide care for female workers. This law tightened factory regulations concerning the employment of expectant mothers. It ordered a ban on overtime, night work, and holiday work.¹⁸⁷ The most important, though, was the creation of nurseries for working mothers. Still, such measures failed to convince large numbers of non-employed women to join the war labor force.

Employed women wanted conscription for all of the women of Germany. On January 13, 1943, Hitler signed the Decree on the General Mobilization of Men and Women for the Defense of the Reich, which required men from ages sixteen to sixty-five and women ages seventeen to forty-five to register for labor service. Working women believed conscripting all women would mean all the women of Germany were equal.¹⁸⁸ Unfortunately for the working women of Germany, it did not mean equality among the classes. Middle and upper class women who did register feared factory work, so for this reason Nazi leaders placed these women in safer environments. This often meant these women worked as secretaries and clerks in offices, unlike the women who already worked in factories and in agriculture. There were also ways for women to avoid employment all together. Many pleaded physical and emotional disabilities, some left

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 104.

¹⁸⁷ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 94.

¹⁸⁸ Rupp, "Women, Class, and Mobilization," 61.

on vacations, many women entered school, and some just refused to register, without suffering immediate consequences.¹⁸⁹

Middle and upper class women used any means to avoid employment, and for this reason, non-employed lower class women felt they should not have to work either. Employed women resented non-employed women of any class, while lower class non-employed women refused to go to work while middle and upper class women “flaunted their wealth and leisure.”¹⁹⁰ In his “Total War” speech, given February 1943, Joseph Goebbels announced all women needed to join in the war effort, and those who did not (although he could not imagine that women would not do their duty) would lose the respect of the people.

I would like to think little of German women if I believed that they do not want to listen to my appeal. They will not seek to follow the letter of the law, or to slip through its loopholes. The few who may try will not succeed. We will not accept a doctor’s excuse. Nor will we accept the alibi that one must help one’s husband or relative or good friend as a way of avoiding work. We will respond appropriately. The few who may attempt it will only lose the respect of those around them. The people will despise them.¹⁹¹

Women still found ways to avoid work, and fellow Germans did despise them for it. Even husbands resented sending their wives to work while middle and upper women enjoyed vacations and other luxuries.

Even though Nazi propaganda urged women to work, other than the attempt to better conditions by the Labor Service, the Nazis offered little incentive for upper and middle class women to participate in the labor force. Women lived off the war pensions provided to them by

¹⁸⁹ Donald D. Wall, *Nazi Germany and World War II* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2002), 205; Rupp, “Women, Class and Mobilization,” 61.

¹⁹⁰ Rupp, “Women, Class, and Mobilization,” 58.

¹⁹¹ Joseph Goebbels, “Total War” speech Berlin, 18 February 1943, in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. and trans. Randall Btywerk (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 131.

the Nazi government, and these pensions allowed for a better standard of living than if women worked in factories. The Nazis made women even less likely to join the labor force by lowering pensions for women who came to work. Even though the *NS-Frauenschaft* argued for increased wages for women, the Nazi leaders ignored the organization. The Nazi regime attempted to control inflation by setting strict wage standards, and this hurt women workers who earned significantly low wages.¹⁹² Although the Nazis promised better working conditions for female war laborers, the incentives for women did not exist.

Offered no incentives, women workers in agriculture had no choice but to assist with the war economy. Goebbels stated these women were the prime example for the working women of Germany. “The wives of farmers have set a good example. Both men and women must be sure that no one does less during the war than they did in peace; more work must instead be done in every area.”¹⁹³ What Goebbels neglected to explain was, with the removal of men from farms, the burden of agriculture fell on women (and foreign workers). These women provided for the war effort by maintaining the food supply for Germany.¹⁹⁴

Nothing was more important than maintaining an adequate food supply, so the Nazis kept records for everything. The Nazis required women to account for everything on the farm or face consequences. Frau Maria Amschel remembered the Nazi leaders in Kemmern (where her farm was located) coming to her farm and taking inventory on her harvest and her animals and ordering her to provide the required amount of foodstuffs. She described an inspection, “How many hens do you have? You have to deliver this many eggs. How many cows do you have? Then you have to deliver this much milk.” She explained what happened when farms did not

¹⁹² Rupp, “Women, Class, and Mobilization,” 59.

¹⁹³ Goebbels, “Total War” speech, 131.

¹⁹⁴ Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 358

bring the required amount, “If you had four cows and you only delivered milk from three, they would have noticed. Stop. Something is missing. Then they came after you. One already had to watch out.”¹⁹⁵ This led to hoarding and cheating on farms. Women kept entirely secret about it though, especially the “black” butchering, where women slaughtered unregistered livestock overnight.¹⁹⁶

Because women in the cities did not have this source of food, urban and rural women created a barter system. Urban women bought commodities and hoarded them until they could make it to the rural areas. Because rural women had no time to shop, the urban women traded the hoarded goods for extra foodstuffs. Oftentimes rural and urban women did not get along and they did not understand one another, although Frau Amschel felt pity for the city women. She described how these women were “fine women” and that “they made us feel sorry.”¹⁹⁷ Other rural women did not share Frau Amschel’s view of the women from the cities bartering for food.

The running of the farms was very difficult for women, not only because of the tough manual labor, but also because the women had their families to care for as well. This was why the *Pflichtjahr* and the Labor Service strived to support the Nazi war economy. In 1936, the Reich Labor Service created the *Reichsarbeitsdienst der weiblichen Jugend* (Reich Labor Service for Young Women—RADwJ).¹⁹⁸ The girls of the RADwJ, known as *Arbeitsmädchen*, lived in camps outside rural areas and assisted with the day-to-day chores of running farms. This term of service educated the girls in work, created a sense of community, and provided

¹⁹⁵ Alison Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 239.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 239-40.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 240.

¹⁹⁸ By 1939, the Labor Service was compulsory for women between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five who were not already employed. Stephenson, “Women’s Labor Service,” 256.

assistance in an area hit hardest by the war. While the Labor Service did educate and create a sense of community, it did not bring the assistance leaders hoped it would. Not only did the girls have short workdays, the *Arbeitsmaiden* changed every three to four weeks, so farmers had to train a new girl.

In 1941, the six-month term of agricultural labor led into a six-month term in the Auxiliary services. Women worked in armaments factories most of the time, but some also worked in the armed forces, transportation, and even hospitals. These girls rotated in jobs as well, so new women trained every three to four weeks, and women who were skilled in the jobs left after a few weeks.¹⁹⁹ Vastly underutilized, the Nazis failed to use these skilled women in the labor force.

Many agricultural women were disappointed with the *Arbeitsmaiden* and young women in the *Pflichtjahr* so they used foreign workers to assist on the farms. Often these workers did more and worked harder on the farms than any of the Nazi girls. This close working arrangement and cooperation caused some mutual understanding to form between German women and foreign workers. As Jill Stephenson observed, foreign workers “often came to seem, after a day’s work, as deserving as family members of a meal at the family table and a good night’s rest in something better than a barn.”²⁰⁰ Although Himmler encouraged employers to starve the workers to control them, many women preferred their work to those of the Nazi girls. The farm relied on the foreign worker many times, so those workers bargained with their employers for improved accommodations, more food, or even sexual favors.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 261.

²⁰⁰ Jill Stephenson, “Triangle: Foreign Workers, German Civilians, and the Nazi Regime. War and Society in Württemberg, 1939-45,” *German Studies Review* 15 (1992): 347.

²⁰¹ Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 69.

Hitler feared foreign workers but realized the war economy required them, especially if he did not mobilize all women. Fritz Sauckel, minister plenipotentiary of foreign labor, convinced Hitler of the need for foreign workers in Germany. By the fall of 1944, Sauckel imported close to seven million foreign workers, many of whom were young women. At this point, foreign workers accounted for twenty percent of the workforce in Germany.²⁰² Conditions were horrible for the *Ostarbeiter* (eastern workers), though. Inadequate housing, lack of food, and hard labor killed many workers, which caused overall productivity to decline. However, as Germany entered into other countries, the Nazis replaced foreign workers easily.²⁰³ “Unlike the Wehrmacht, which could not replace its losses, the foreign workforce never suffered from a shortage of fresh replacements.”²⁰⁴

Friendships with foreign workers and German women alarmed the Nazis. Sexual relations among German women and foreign men especially alarmed them because of the Nazi obsession with race. If caught, German women and foreign men encountered terrible consequences. The police arrested the man and hanged him, while forcing the German woman to watch. The woman then had her head shaved, was publically humiliated and shamed, and even served a jail sentence. Himmler had guidelines for the arrests of these women. He approved of public humiliation and he did not object to shocking punishments like hair shaving or parading through the village while wearing a derogatory sign. Many women felt disgust with this extreme treatment from the Nazis. Many also compared the treatment of German women with foreign lovers to those of German men with foreign lovers. German men rarely received punishment for

²⁰² Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 517.

²⁰³ Tooze observed that while some Nazi leaders wanted to import more foreign workers, the SS in the occupied areas kept murdering them. Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 520.

²⁰⁴ Wall, *World War II*, 203.

their indiscretion. This caused a lowering of morale among women because the Nazis no longer abused only “inferior” people, they abused their own people as well.

Women in industry also interacted with foreign workers. The treatment of the workers was harsher in industry than working on farms though. Although the Nazis attempted to segregate the German women from the foreign workers, they did come across one another. Many women formed friendships with foreign workers because they worked close to them day in and day out, which led to more understanding and sympathy. According to historian Elizabeth Heinemann, “Women had relationships with foreign workers and prisoners of war for the same reasons they had relationships with German men. They came to like them in daily life; they appreciated their help on their farms or in their businesses; they desired friendship and intimacy; they sought sex; they were pressured or forced into it.”²⁰⁵ This attitude went against all Nazi ideals of creating the perfect Aryan race.

Propaganda encouraged women to consider the health and purity of the German *Volk*. They should not have contact with foreigners or prisoners of war. Relations with them would supposedly lead to a diluting of Aryan blood. Articles encouraged other women to discourage relations with foreigners. “We must attempt to persuade each German-blooded woman who is considering a relationship with a foreigner that her behavior is improper, inconsistent with the racial expectations of society. It must be clear that such behavior is a crime against the future of our people.”²⁰⁶ Nazi propaganda focused on “blood” when it should have focused on women.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Elizabeth Heinemann, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?: Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 57.

²⁰⁶ *Nachrichtendienst der Reichfrauenführung Sonderdienst* 10 (Sept 1941), <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/rff-sonderdienst.htm> (accessed September 25, 2014).

²⁰⁷ Heinemann, *Husband*, 58.

While the Nazis focused on the racial destruction of Germany through foreign workers, they also sent young German women into Poland. The idea of Germanization sent women into the east to assist with the Nazi resettlement program. Propaganda and Nazi education convinced these women that the inferior Poles were dangerous enemies of Germany. Melita Maschmann recalled her Nazi indoctrination, “At the outbreak of the war I was utterly convinced of our superior moral position. The news of ‘Bloody Sunday’ at Bromberg, on which (according to the German press) 60,000 German nationals were supposed to have been murdered in an appallingly savage manner, thoroughly justified a war against Poland in my eyes. Should not a stop be put to such bestiality?”²⁰⁸ She was not the only woman to feel this way.

The resettlement of ethnic Germans from the Baltic states and elsewhere required many women to assist with the expulsion and cleaning of the former Polish homes. Historian Elizabeth Harvey found that the Nazis needed women to establish order for the incoming German settlers. This meant cleaning the homes after the Germans expelled the Poles, exemplifying proper German behavior, and acting to “strengthen Germandom.”²⁰⁹ Above all, women were supposed to provide a Nazi presence to counteract the Polish “enemy.”

By 1940, women had even more to fear. Nazi enemies moved from the battlefields and into Germany’s skies and against Germany’s citizens. These attacks, known to the British as morale bombing but to Germans as terror bombing, were meant to wear down the Germans. “Civilians are not military targets, but if they produce anything for the military or live near the production sites, it is a different story... Whoever works and lives in those surroundings is

²⁰⁸Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered: A Dossier on my Former Self*, trans. Geoffrey Strachan (London: Aberland-Schuman, 1964), 59-60.

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth Harvey, *Women in the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanisation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 79-80

participating in the war effort.”²¹⁰ Often, because men were on the battlefields, women were the most affected by the Allied morale bombs. The air raid alarms interrupted average days and sent women, the elderly, and children to find shelter. Unfortunately, those who could not find shelter faced death by shrapnel or burns from phosphorous bombs. Many times people died from direct hits to air raid shelters.

One young diarist recorded her interpretations and fears during the bombing raids. Käthe Ricken, her husband away at war, and her young son faced the daily raids in their cellar. Her entry on July 25, 1943, read:

I sat there cowering, with my head tucked between my shoulders. We all prayed out loud with our landlord. The whole world was shaking like an earthquake. You could actually feel our house moving up and down. Every bomb made a hissing and whistling noise as it fell. Then there would be a bang, followed by a rumbling sound. How often we thought: “This one’s for us!”²¹¹

Her family suffered from hunger, illness, with no water, gas, or electricity. Death surrounded her when she emerged from the cellar. Dead bodies littered the streets, and she found, “mothers with children in their arms, shriveled by the heat into mummies.”²¹²

Surviving the bombing attacks became a daily struggle. Air raid sirens sounded at all hours of the day and night. The air raids took their toll on the female population. Women did not sleep or when they did awoke with stomachaches and anxieties from the inevitable air raid warning. Many feared the expectation of an alarm more than the alarm itself. When the alarm

²¹⁰ Friedrich, *The Fire*, 49.

²¹¹ Ricken lived in Hamburg in 1943. Operation Gomorrah (the Allied bombing of Hamburg) occurred in late July 1943. The Allied bombers used incendiary bombs to create firestorms and destroy houses. These attacks left roughly 41,000 dead and 900,000 homeless. Käthe Ricken, “Life Under the Bombs,” in *The Nazi State and German Society: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Robert Moeller (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 125-126.

²¹² Ibid, 127.

sounded, women packed bags and moved children and the elderly into shelters, but the expectation led to a strain on nerves.²¹³ Although anxious and scared, many women survived the ordeal. When the war ended in 1945, these same women became the *Trümmerfrauen* (Rubble Women) who assisted with the rebuilding of cities.²¹⁴

Allied bombing of German cities not only caused fear for women, but also many women and their families had to leave their homes before or after the attacks. Because of the constant fear of air raid attacks, the Nazis set up *Kinderlandverschickung* (KLV) in 1940. This evacuation scheme sent children and mothers with infants to the countryside where specialized camps were set up. In the first few months the program evacuated almost 200,000 children from Berlin and Hamburg alone.²¹⁵ As the air raids continued and more cities evacuated children, the numbers continued to rise. Mothers with infants and children under ten often joined relatives in the countryside.

Women who did not want to separate from their children often joined host families who received extra rations for allowing evacuated families into their homes. Problems arose because the different families did not understand each other culturally, since urban women from the north went to predominantly rural south Germany and Austria. The women in the countryside who woke early and worked into the evening did not understand how urban women slept in and did not do manual labor. Sometimes the women from the cities did not even care for the house while the farming women worked. Nazi propaganda tried to explain to the rural women that women from the cities had shown bravery and discipline night after night as the air raid warnings and the

²¹³ Friedrich, *The Fire*, 438-439.

²¹⁴ By 1946, the Allied Control Council required citizens to clean the bombed cities of Germany and Austria. Because of the loss of German men during the war, this task fell mainly on women.

²¹⁵ Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives Under the Nazis* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 52-53.

bombs fell on their homes and cities, and that only those with the shared experience could understand. “It is easy to understand why women from these areas, particularly those with children, have a need to ‘recover’ longer or shorter periods of time in less bombing-threatened areas such as Southern Germany or the *Ostmark*. The southern German population may complain about the increased workload, but it is only a certain sharing of the burden.”²¹⁶ The article also emphasized that urban women must not exploit their host’s aid. It showed a lack of good behavior and understanding. “This is a matter of good behavior, understanding, and consideration that is necessary if we are not to make life difficult for each other.”²¹⁷ The Nazis needed women to support one another, although that did not always happen.

Even after Hitler committed suicide and Nazi rule ended, women still had one more role to play for the Nazis; many men in the Allied Armies wanted revenge for Nazi crimes. When the Allied armies, especially the Red Army, entered into Germany, all women suffered. Many of the Allied troops entered into Germany and found a country of women, and this led to the rape of millions of women, with most victims raped repeatedly. The Allied troops, especially troops of the Red Army, considered German women part of the spoils of war. Soviet troops viewed German women as provocative, decadent, and “wickedly seductive and were regarded by many as the spoils of war just as much as food and alcohol.”²¹⁸ When Allied troops entered Germany, no women were safe. “No female person between the ages of 12 and 80 was safe from rape.”²¹⁹ Meltia Maschmann encountered rapes of German women by American soldiers. One night a “drunken man suddenly flung open the door of my room and lay down beside me with his gun in

²¹⁶ *Nachrichteneinst der Reichsfrauenführung Sonderdienst*, v. 10, #16 (September 1941), <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/rff-sonderdienst.htm> (accessed September 25, 2014).

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 452; Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 107.

²¹⁹ German women raped by foreign soldiers, in *Women in Nazi Germany*, Jill Stephenson (Essex: Pearson Education, 2001), 175

almost one bound.”²²⁰ She managed to escape by jumping out of the window, which considerably angered the American. Another woman found it difficult to describe the treatment by incoming troops. She stated, “They *stole, robbed, and raped* women. It was indescribable. The English, the Canadians, and the Americans. Indescribable.”²²¹ All of the Allied troops were guilty of these atrocities against German women, but especially the soldiers of the Red Army.

The men of the Red Army came in from the east and women, children, and the elderly fled from the advancing army. Many did not survive these treks because the Russians caught up to them. As the Red Army rolled through Germany, they raped German women from the very young to the elderly. Frau Regina Frankenfeld told the story of the rapes of herself, her mother, and grandmother and her reaction afterward. “And then as we were then all hauled out of the cellar and as they stood there with their machine guns, my mother said, ‘Well, now we’ll probably be shot.’ And I said, ‘It is all the same to me.’” It *really* was all the same to me. I mean, we had nothing more to lose. And this whole massacre. Well, no one had any interest in going on with life, not at all.”²²² No women were safe. Women were gang raped and afterward, many were tortured, mutilated, shot or bludgeoned to death.²²³ Women contracted sexually transmitted diseases passed on by rapists. If impregnated, German women sought abortions after the Allied rapes. If women chose not to abort, many abandoned the babies after they were born. Even though the Nazi reign ended in 1945, women suffered from the consequences of the Third Reich. After the Allied occupation of Germany, the issue of rape was ignored. Russians occupied East

²²⁰ Maschmann, *Account*, 173.

²²¹ Owings, *Frauen*, 97

²²² Frau Frankenfeld continued that she could not stand when people only talk of the atrocities of the Germans during the war. The Soviet Army raped her, her mother, and grandmother and, she believed, many just ignore these rapes of German women. Owings, *Frauen*, 405-06

²²³ Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 710

Germany and the United States, Britain, and France attempted to “remasculinize” West Germany, which meant discussion of rape was taboo on both sides.²²⁴

The women of Berlin suffered immensely as well. The Soviet Army entered into the city and raped a countless number of women, many times in front of German men. Published anonymously, one woman recounted her experiences during the Soviet occupation of Berlin. Because she spoke Russian, the residents of her apartment building asked her to speak with a Russian commander. They wanted her to convince the commander to order a stop to the attempted rapes of women. When she left the basement hideout, two Russian men attacked and raped her in the corridor. They locked the door behind her when the men attacked. Other Russian soldiers laughed as the men raped her, and the Germans in the basement did nothing.²²⁵ She lost respect for her fellow Germans and sought out Russian officers, who raped her but protected her from gang rapes.

The Nazi Party promised to protect the women of Germany, but they did not. When Allied troops entered into Germany, the cowardly men left the women to their grisly fate. The anonymous journalist in Berlin wrote:

These days I keep noticing how my feelings toward men—and the feelings of all other women—are changing. We feel sorry for them; they seem so miserable and powerless. The weaker sex. Deep down we women are experiencing a kind of collective disappointment. The Nazi world—ruled by men, glorifying the strong man—is beginning to crumble, and with it the myth of the “Man.” In earlier wars men could claim the privilege of killing and being killed for the fatherland was theirs and theirs alone. Today

²²⁴ Frank B. Tipton, *A History of Modern Germany Since 1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 525. Atina Grossmann, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers,” *October* 72 (Spring 1995): 48-49.

²²⁵ Published anonymously in 1959, *A Woman in Berlin*, the author asked that her name not be released except upon her death. Her name was Marta Hillers and she was a German journalist. The latest edition of the journal, released in 2005, continued to list the author as Anonymous. [Marta Hillers], *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 43-44.

we women, too, have a share. That has transformed us, emboldened us. Among the many defeats at the end of this war is the defeat of the male sex.²²⁶

Many women did not follow Nazi rule blindly. The Nazis preached motherhood for women and promised to care for women of the Third Reich, but some women protested the rule of the Nazis. Sophie Scholl was one woman who resisted the Nazi rule. Sophie and her brother Hans Scholl were college students during the Nazi era. The Scholls founded the White Rose Society to protest the Nazi government. The society produced and distributed anti-Nazi and anti-war leaflets. The first Leaflet of the White Rose stated in the opening paragraph:

Nothing is so unworthy of a civilized nation to allow itself to be “governed” without any opposition by an irresponsible clique that has yielded to the basest instincts. It is certainly the case today that every honest German is ashamed of his government. Who among us has any conception of the enormous shame that we and our children will feel when eventually the veil drops from our eyes and the most horrible of crimes—crimes that eclipse all atrocities throughout history—are exposed in the full light of day? If the German people are already so corrupted and spiritually crushed that they do not raise a hand, unquestioningly trusting in the dubious legitimacy of historical order; if they surrender man’s highest principal, that which raises him above God’s creatures, his freewill; if they abandon the will to take decisive action and turn the wheel of history and thus subject it to their own rational decision; if they are so devoid of all individuality, have already gone so far along the road toward becoming a spiritless and cowardly mass—then, yes, they deserve their downfall.²²⁷

Scholl and her brother passed this and other leaflets across the Munich University campus. On February 18, 1943, the Gestapo captured her and her brother. The Nazi courts indicted Sophie and her brother and other members of the White Rose on the charges of distributing leaflets during the war, which, “called for the sabotage of the war effort...and for the overthrow of the National Socialist way of life for our people, have propagated defeatist ideas, and have most vulgarly defamed the Führer.”²²⁸ The accusations continued by declaring the

²²⁶ [Hillers], *A Woman in Berlin*, 42-43.

²²⁷ The first leaflet, in *Sophie Scholl and the White Rose*, Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 186.

²²⁸ Transcript of the sentences, in *Sophie Scholl*, 214.

White Rose gave aid to the enemies of the Third Reich and destroyed the security of the German nation. The court sentenced Sophie and her brother to death and they were executed on February 22, 1943. The Nazis feared one twenty-year old woman for attempting to end the Third Reich. Women in the resistance movement created a lack of morale, and for that reason, the Nazis jailed and executed them.

Women's roles during World War II revolved around morale. The Nazis needed to keep women content on the home front so morale would stay high on the battlefield. Unfortunately for the Nazis, they failed at keeping morale high. Hitler and the Nazis did not want to conscript non-working women. These women had never worked so the Nazis did not forcibly send them into factories to work. This angered the women already in the labor force. It showed the inequality created by the Nazis. These women, often the lower class, resented the regime that did not create equality for all the women of Germany. Even when Hitler ordered the conscription of all German women, many found ways to avoid work. Women in agriculture suffered even more. When men left the farms, only the women remained. The Nazis attempted to give relief to these women with the Labor Service and *Pflichtjahr* but failed. The girls sent to the farms did not want to work and had very short working hours. Foreign workers provided more relief than any of the Nazi girls. Foreign workers made up a large population of the German workforce, which was another reason for the Nazis not to conscript all women into the workforce. The working women resented the upper and middle class women, especially the women who lived off husband's war pensions. These women lived better on the pensions than they would by joining the labor force. The mobilization of women was a complete failure.

The German loss at Stalingrad also caused women to lose faith in the Nazi regime. After Stalingrad, women understood the war was no longer in Germany's favor. As the war turned

against Germany, the morale of women was at a low on the home front. Because of Nazi fears of public defeatism, the government turned on its own people. The SS dealt harsh punishments for women caught in relationships with foreign workers. The Nazis feared the women in the resistance movement and sentenced these women to extreme punishments. These extreme measures turned women away from the Third Reich. Before the war, the Nazis promised to care for women and continually passed legislation to protect women even during the war. As the war drew to a close, the Nazis abandoned the women of Germany. Mass rape turned women against not only the Nazis but the men of Germany as well. Although some women did continue to support the Nazis until the end of the war and beyond, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink being a perfect example, many turned from the Nazi men who promised to protect German women for One Thousand Years.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Women held diverse roles throughout the Nazi era and, while millions of women worked and engaged in the Nazi regime, three women exemplified the roles of Nazi women: Eva Braun, the Mistress; Magda Goebbels, the unofficial First Lady of the Third Reich, and Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the “Perfect Nazi Woman”. These women were the ideal for the women of Germany. Eva Braun was devoted to Hitler. Braun, unlike Goebbels and Scholtz-Klink, stayed behind her Führer, where the Nazis believed women should be, at least rhetorically. Historians have labeled her shallow, stupid, shy, and a host of other derogatory terms though. She was the mistress of one of the most influential men in Europe in the early 20th century though. Magda Goebbels, wife of the Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels, was beautiful and elegant. She led the ideal Nazi life. She married a prominent man, bore six racially exemplary children, and lived the life of luxury; until she murdered her children, then committed suicide herself. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink held the title of the “Perfect Nazi Woman”. The *Reichsfrauenführerin* preached the merits of Nazism for women. She looked the part of the ideal Nazi woman and raised eleven children before her death in 1999. She held her beliefs in the utopian Nazi society into her death. Although women held no political influence (despite what Scholtz-Klink wanted to believe), these women owned a place in Nazi society.

In October 1929, a young woman met the man she was to marry then willingly commit suicide with. This young woman, Eva Braun, met Adolf Hitler in her uncle’s portrait studio. She was seventeen and he twenty-three years her senior. Although Hitler cared for her throughout the years they were together, few people even knew of her existence. A newspaper mistakenly published a photograph of her in the company of Hitler at the Olympic Games. She remained

hidden from the German public and was one of the few close women to Hitler. Her life compared little to the Nazi ideal woman who produced many children and kept to the home. She cared little for politics and more for novels and leisure. “By all appearances, Eva Braun was a young woman of average abilities from a conventional, lower-middle class family. She clearly did not stand out due to her background or her interests.”²²⁹ Her life as a Nazi woman did not play out to the public during the Nazi era, but she became a complex figure in the life of Hitler.

The next Nazi woman, Magda Goebbels, was the unofficial First Lady of the Third Reich. Born November 11, 1901, she married Joseph Goebbels in December 1931. She set a good example as the ideal Nazi woman. She was a mother to six children, stood by her husband’s side, and “‘exercised her influence in the household’.”²³⁰ She was even honored with the first Honor Cross of the German Mother. She and Joseph Goebbels lived the life of luxury, with a house seized from a Jewish family on a peninsula in the Wannsee, Schwanenwerder.²³¹ She had six children from her marriage: Helga, Hilde, Helmuth, Holde, Hedda, and Heide. She had two miscarriages though. She enjoyed her time with Hitler, who often interfered in the affairs of the First Lady and the Propaganda Minister.

Although the Nazis criticized the extra-marital affair, many Nazi leaders chose to have affairs, including Joseph Goebbels. He often flaunted mistresses in front of his wife. When she arranged an affair of her own, Hitler was furious. “A divorced propaganda minister from the best-known recipient of the state ‘Mother’s Cross’ could not be tolerated.”²³² Hitler ordered her to remain with her husband, whom Hitler ordered to rid of his mistress. Goebbels cared nothing

²²⁹ Heike B. Görtemaker, *Eva Braun: Life with Hitler*, trans. Damion Searls (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 6.

²³⁰ Anna Maria Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, trans. NDE Publishing (Ontario: NDE Publishing, 2000), 85.

²³¹ Ibid, 86.

²³² Ibid, 89.

for the politics of National Socialism but was an intelligent woman and rarely spoke against them. She knew the racism surrounding the Nazi party but focused on her husband as father and not as a criminal.

She was the ultimate Nazi wife because on May 1, 1945, she murdered her children then committed suicide with her husband. She explained in a letter to her oldest son, Harold Quandt, that she and her family ended their lives in an “honorable conclusion” and died for National Socialism.²³³ Her husband shot himself and she bit a cyanide capsule, they both died immediately. Goebbels’s biographer, Anja Klabunde, observed, “National Socialism used the idealistic tendencies of the German people to pervert them in the most shameful way. Its ideals were cruel, barbaric and anti-life. But even in the face of death, Magda could and would not admit that.”²³⁴ Goebbels was the perfect Nazi wife.

Even though both Braun and Goebbels were Nazi women, only one woman stood out as the “Perfect Nazi Woman”, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink. Her long, blond hair pulled into braids and her slim, lean form meant she looked the part of the perfect Nazi woman, but she enthusiastically worked for the party also. Because she exemplified the perfect Nazi woman, Hitler appointed her *Reichsfrauenführerin*. Her value as a writer and orator proved perfect for leading the women of Germany, although she held no actual political power over them. Her speeches and articles featured women’s issues, such as motherhood, “womanly work”, education, and labor. She did not believe in the “emancipation” of women. She manipulated emancipated women and convinced many to leave behind the idea of equality of men and women in society. She provided proof of exemplary motherhood with eleven children of her own. Her focus on education offered curriculum specifically focused on motherhood. By 1939, one and one-half million women

²³³ Anja Klabunde, *Magda Goebbels*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Sphere, 2001), 320.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 323.

attended maternity schools and 500,000 studied home economics.²³⁵ Although she did not agree with women in the labor force, she controlled the women's labor service. Hitler applauded her services, but he did not respect her. He believed women to be too emotional for public office, so he never acknowledged her as more than a secretary.²³⁶ Although he banned women from political office, he unofficially gave Scholtz-Klink authority over the women of Germany.

Scholtz-Klink ignored the atrocities of the Nazis and explained to historian Claudia Koonz that she regretted not doing more for Nazi society. In an interview Koonz asked her about her greatest contribution to Nazi society, and Scholtz-Klink explained, "Our job (and we did it well) was to infuse the daily life of all German women—even in the tiniest village—with the Nazi ideals."²³⁷ She held no political power, but women related to her and turned to her with their issues and concerns. By 1941, one in five German women belonged in her association.²³⁸ She was a Nazi until the day she died. Histories of Nazi Germany often ignore these women though, because men controlled the Third Reich.

Although women were largely invisible during the Nazi era, they nonetheless held important roles in the regime. To the Nazis, motherhood was the most important role for women, and they attempted to create the perfect Aryan mother. The perfect mother was the nurturer and the caretaker of the future offspring of the Third Reich. The Nazis passed legislation and programs to insure the next generation would be racially fit. Some of these programs assisted women, like the motherhood classes provided by the *NS-Frauenschaft*, but some of the programs

²³⁵ Martin Collier and Phillip Pedley, *Germany 1919-1945* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2000), 207.

²³⁶ Sigmund, *Women*, 114.

²³⁷ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), xxiv.

²³⁸ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present Volume II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 305.

hurt women. Men decided which women fit the criteria of the ideal German mother and sterilized and murdered those who did not meet their criteria.

Women also played roles in the racism of Nazi Germany. Women joined the BDM and went into the east where they assisted in the expulsion of Jews and Poles. They ignored the fact that people lost their homes. Concentration and death camps were vital to Nazi racial programs and women worked in them. From secretaries who decided who should enter the gas chambers, to Kommandant's wives, to the female guards in the concentration and death camps, women aided in the killing process. These women were regarded by camp victims as being as vicious as the male guards; if not at times worse. Many of these women even enjoyed their role in dispensing the racial hatred on the Nazi regime.

The role of women in World War II was important for Hitler and the Nazis. They needed women to control the morale of the war. Hitler wanted to avoid another "stab in the back" as allegedly in the First World War. He blamed this betrayal on the women of the previous era because they wrote the letters from home that lowered morale on the battlefields. Hitler and the Nazis were determined not to repeat this. They did not fully use women for war work because they did not want to anger the women of the upper and middle classes. They ignored those women already working. The Nazis could have helped morale for them by providing better working conditions and making everyone equal in the workforce. They did not do this, though, and it angered many women against Hitler and the regime.

The Nazis failed women during the twelve years in power. The Nazis asked women to relegate themselves to the role of mother but still required them to perform duties outside of the motherly roles. They wanted to keep women away from the violence but expected women to work in the East and in concentration and death camps. They failed women during World War II

by excluding upper and middle-class women in the labor force. By the end of World War II, the Nazis still failed women when the Allied armies entered into Germany and German women suffered mass rapes.

Although the Nazis failed German women, many still did their part for the Nazi regime. The Nazi classification of women as mothers and caretakers did not define the women in the Nazi era. Some women ardently supported the regime, some protested it and died because of it, and many just ignored the Nazi politics, still women held diverse roles in the Nazi regime. The roles of women were not in the public eye like those of men, but women's roles were interwoven into the fabric of Nazi Germany.

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